

ITALIA!

Issue 133 December 2015 £4.40

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HOLIDAYS PROPERTY FOOD WINE CULTURE PEOPLE

THE PERFECT CITY

Where would you choose to live? Florence, Rome, Venice?
We explore your city-living options

Italian gifts for Christmas

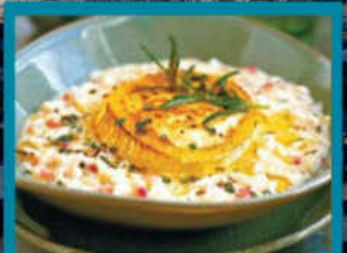
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Exploring the Veneto glass by glass

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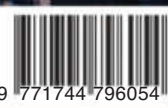
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Welcome!



I've been fortunate enough to have visited Florence many times. Every time arrive I take time to sit in one of the city's many squares, sipping a coffee, soaking up the atmosphere of this unique destination. And every time I leave I swear to come back as soon as I can. I am also fortunate enough to know several people who

live there... They tell me that, yes, it gets hot in the summer and, yes, the sheer volume of tourists can get a bit much at times. But they all have their 'secret' haunts where there isn't an English-speaking voice to be heard. And, what's more, they swear they'd never want to live anywhere else.

But how about you? Would Florence be your city of choice in which to live? Or even have a holiday apartment? In this issue of *Italia!* we explore city-living options not just in Florence, but all over the country. Perhaps you'd prefer the hustle and bustle of Rome? Or time out on the backwaters of Venice? Or maybe a city a little less obvious? Turn to page 22 for Fleur Kinson's expert advice on Italian city living.

Elsewhere in this issue we take you far and wide, from the remarkable Cheese Festival in Bra, across to the Prosecco Road in the Veneto and right down to the island of Sicily for another heart-warming 48 Hours.

As ever, I really do hope you enjoy the issue.

Paul P.

Paul Pettengale Editor

PS *Italia!*'s brand new guide to Rome & the South is on sale now (£7.99). Visit www.italytravelandlife.com/italiaguides for details.

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Subscribe to *Italia!* for our exclusive Christmas book offer* and get the magazine delivered directly to your door every month! Turn to page 32 for more information.

*UK orders only

City living in Florence, and beyond

AWARD WINNER!
The Italian Tourist Board voted *Italia!* the 'Best Overall Publication 2011'



THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



CHRIS ALLSOP isn't, thankfully, lactose intolerant. Because for this issue of *Italia!* we sent him to the town of Bra in Piedmont, the home of the Slow Food movement, it's also

where you'll discover the bi-annual Cheese Festival. You can imagine what it's all about, but you can find out what it's like to experience it from page 52.



FLEUR KINSON once again presents us with her in-depth knowledge of the Italian property market. This time it's city living she's looking at. Is it really as expensive as

you'd imagine? Where are the bargains to be found? And what are the practicalities of buying and staying in a city house or apartment? Join her on page 22.



JOE GARTMAN is one of our two resident experts on Italian art and culture. In this issue he travels to the incredible 'Painted Room' in Mantua (revealed on page 62 and beyond)

and he returns to one of the most famous of all Italian art galleries and museums, the absolutely stunning Uffizi in Florence – a place that just has to be visited (see p30).



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ON THE COVER



YOUR ITALIA!

READERS' PHOTO COMPETITION!

Send us your favourite photos from your Italian travels, and each month the best photo will win a bottle of **Nino Franco Rustico Prosecco** and cooler!*



THIS MONTH'S WINNER

Kathy Christiansen, Sugar Grove, Illinois

"This picture of hanging greens was taken in Florence walking back from the Ponte Vecchio. This was our first December trip to Italy. We found the holiday season in Italy was a beautiful time to visit."

SEE MORE OF
YOUR PHOTOS ON
OUR WEBSITE:

italytravelandlife.com

ITALIA!
Italy travel and life

WIN!
NINO FRANCO RUSTICO
PROSECCO & CHILLER*



◀ *Michael Lawton, Stoke on Trent*
“With dozens of people taking pictures of St. Marks Basilica, I managed to capture these two ladies snapping away on there smartphones. I like the way the opposite colours mirror each other, red hair, black hat and red pullover, black pullover. It’s a fun picture and they had no idea I was there.”



◀ *Catherine Creban, Rotherham*
“This is Christ Pantocrator (Almighty), the main mosaic of the apse in Monreale Cathedral, Sicily. Others can be found in the cathedral at Cefalù, and in the Palatine Chapel and the Martorana in Palermo. The Monreale mosaic is 20 metres high. On the floor you see the Arab influence in the floor mosaics. Similar ones can be seen in Cefalù.”



▲ *Michael DiCarlo, Boston, Massachusetts*
“As the sun set on Locanda San Vigilio, Lago di Garda, I noticed how different the light was 40 feet apart: a setting sun on the main building, dusk on the pier.”



◀ *Steve Greig, Bury St Edmunds*
“The most spectacular sunset over Capo Caccia in northwest Sardinia. On Sunday evenings many small boats set off, moor up and view this magnificent sight.”



Phil Bremner, Ilford
“Despite seeing Venice in endless movies nothing really prepares you for the exquisite timeless beauty of this astonishing city.”

HOW TO ENTER Email high-resolution (300dpi) jpegs of your photos of Italy to italia@anthem-publishing.com or send prints to ‘Reader Photo Competition’ at the address given on page 18. Please include a brief explanation of your photo, plus your name, delivery address and a phone number (for our couriers). You must be over 18 to enter.

READER OFFER *Italia!* readers get a 10 per cent discount off Nino Franco wines from www.sommelierschoice.com until 31 December 2015 by entering the code ‘italia10’ at the checkout.

Please note: Any photos you submit must be your own work and you must have the right to send them for inclusion on this page. By sending your entry, you are confirming that *Italia!*’s use of your photo(s) will not constitute infringement of any rights, and confirming that you are over 18.



*Prosecco and cooler delivered to mainland UK addresses only

THIS MONTH

December 2015

In **Italian news** this month, Ferraris for lifeboats, buried treasure in Cosenza, American pizza in Rome and Italian truffles in Norfolk...



Is there a hidden hoard of riches buried in Cosenza?

The burial of Alaric, King of the Visigoths



RAIDERS OF THE LOST CANDELABRA!

The Indiana Jones films may not have been as far-fetched as we all thought. Italian archaeologists are preparing to excavate an area of land near Cosenza, Calabria, in search of fabled Roman treasure that was once hunted by the Nazis. According to legend, the cache was buried alongside the body of Alaric, King of the Visigoths, who sacked Rome in the 5th century AD. It is said to include the Menorah – a priceless candelabra that the Romans looted from Jerusalem's Second Temple in 70AD – along with silver and gold. Adolf Hitler is said to have been fascinated with the story, and deployed his henchmen to try to find and bring back the treasure, but – as in the Indiana Jones films – they were unsuccessful. And medieval historian Pietro De Leo has issued a word of caution: "There are few doubts that the King of the Goths was buried in Cosenza," he said, "But I don't believe there was an immense treasure."

Photograph of Busento by Manja – Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons – https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cosenza_busento.jpg#/media/File:Cosenza_busento.jpg



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SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...SNIPPETS...



KIDS PROTECTED BY NEW SMOKING LAW

Italy has banned smoking in cars that are carrying children and pregnant women. The new law, which was voted for by the Council of Ministers and introduced by Health Minister Beatrice Lorenzin, will come into force by the end of the year, and is one of several new measures designed to raise awareness of the dangers of smoking. The law is in line with recent UK legislation which has made smoking in cars carrying children illegal from 1 October. Since Italy banned smoking in public places in 2005 the number of smokers in the country has fallen from 23.8 per cent of the population to 19.5 per cent.

TAX CUTS AIM TO BOLSTER ITALIAN ECONOMY

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is planning to lower taxes on primary residences as part of an expansive budget for 2016. The move is designed to encourage private consumption and ultimately spur Italy's economy, as the country seeks to climb out of its longest recession since the Second World War. As well as the €3.6 billion tax cut to private homes, Renzi has announced a year's extension to the reduction in high social security levies that made Italy's labour costs among the highest in Europe. The measure seems to be working, with hiring on the increase: in August, unemployment in the country dropped to 11.9 per cent, the lowest it's been for two and a half years.



The media has been awash with negative stories about the “migrant crisis” as boatloads of refugees arrive in Europe from Syria. So this month *Italia!* is pleased to bring you a more positive take on the situation. It transpires that some of the new arrivals are forming friendships with Italy’s senior citizens. While waiting for their applications to be dealt with at Sicily’s Mineo reception centre, asylum seekers are being driven to local retirement homes by volunteers from the Sant’Egidio religious community. There they spend time in the company of elderly people who are suffering from loneliness. While it might seem like an unlikely collaboration, Piero Giglio, a representative from Sant’Egidio, explains that the two parties have more in common than you might think, saying, “[The residents] are not happy they had to leave their homes, their things, to live in this place. It’s a bit like life in Mineo.”

Turns out Ferraris are good for more than just making you look cool and go fast – they can also help save lives. Two rare examples of the Italian supercar, donated in his will to the Royal National Lifeboat Association (RNLI) by the late businessman Richard Colton, sold for more than £8.5 million at a UK auction in October. The 1960 red 250 GT SWB fetched £6.6 million, while a 1967 silver 275 GTB/4 raised £1.93 million. All the proceeds will be given to the charity. Paul Bossier, chief executive of the RNLI, said of Colton, who died in March aged 82, “His legacy will help our volunteer crews carry out their life-saving work around the coast. In line with Mr Colton’s wishes, some of the money raised from the sale will go towards funding a new Shannon-class lifeboat, which will be named after Mr Colton and his late wife, Caroline.”

Photograph © John Stillwell/PA Wire

Italy has overtaken France to become the world's leading wine producer, according to new figures. The shift in power is down to the differing weather conditions on either side of the Alps – while Italy has enjoyed mild weather, resulting in an abundant grape harvest, France has seen a lack of rain and a heatwave. The result is that Italy's projected wine production is up 13 per cent on last year's, with a total forecast of 48.8 million hectolitres, while France's is down one per cent, totalling 46.4 million hectolitres. And if that's not a reason to raise a glass of Chianti, we don't know what is!

Back in September, we brought you the devastating news that George Clooney was planning to sell his 18th-century villa near Lake Como – before adding a hopeful caveat that he may merely be looking to buy elsewhere in Italy, rather than leave the country altogether. Well, we were right! The Hollywood heartthrob and his wife Amal have reportedly made an offer on a holiday home in Tuscany. The property in question is a cliff-top villa in the seaside town of Castiglione della Pescaia. A source told *The Sun* newspaper, “George has been looking all summer but loves the place and has put an offer in.” (Want to stay in George Clooney’s wedding suite? See [Top Picks](#).)





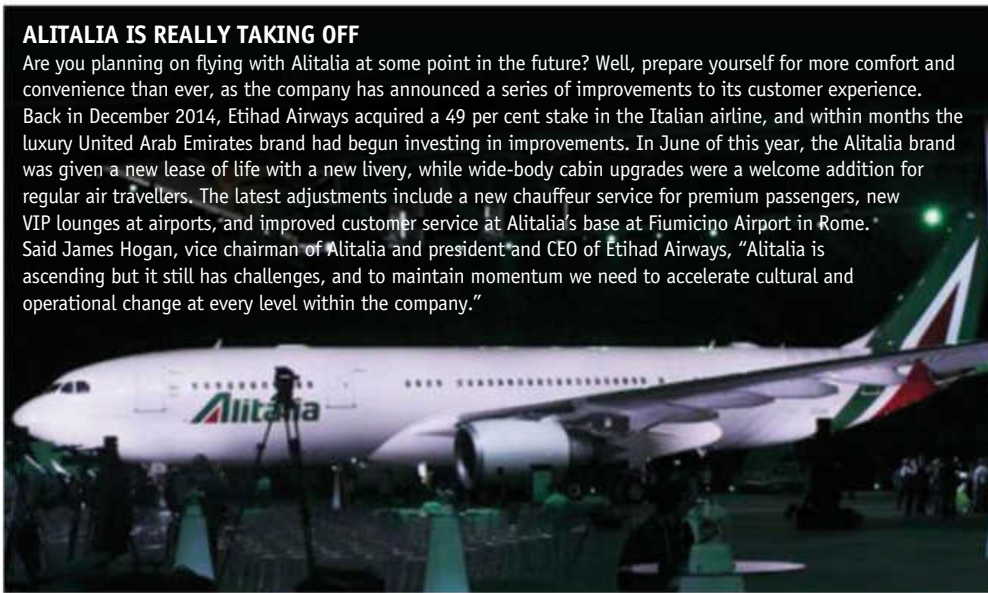
The Second World War ended 70 years ago, but at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea lies

Once they had pinpointed the whereabouts of the fallen bomber – around four miles off Palermo – they still faced a number of challenges, as visibility under the water was so poor. But eventually, they found the wreckage and were able to get close enough to photograph serial numbers on the engine and in the cockpit – enabling them to make a formal identification. The B-17 had been nicknamed 'Devils from Hell' by its nine-man crew – all of whom now rest eternally at the bottom of the sea.

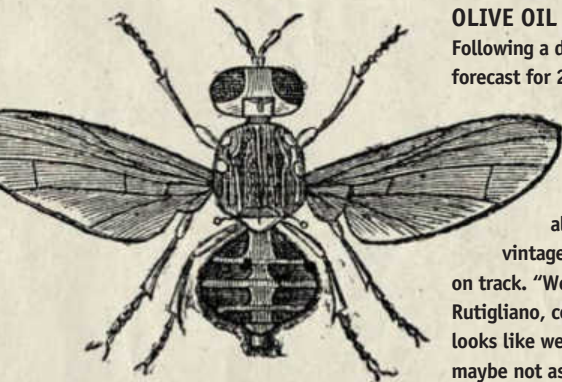


When in Rome, you do as the Romans do – you don't try to show them how to do it. But that's the accusation being levelled at Domino's Pizza by some critics, after the US chain opened its first ever branch in Italy. The restaurant in Milan is expected to be the first of four being opened across the country by the end of the year, and Domino's is excited at the prospect. "No major American pizza brand has successfully entered the [Italian] market," enthused Richard Allison, president of Domino's International. "We're going where no major pizza brand has gone before." To help ingratiate itself with the natives, the chain has promised to only use locally produced ingredients in its pizzas. But the Milanese newspaper *Corriere della Sera* remained skeptical, saying, "Let's face it, it's like selling ice cubes to Eskimos." Meanwhile, Starbucks, the world's biggest coffee chain, is also rumoured to be considering opening its first branches in Italy. When quizzed on the rumour, a Starbucks spokesman described it as "speculation only".

Are you planning on flying with Alitalia at some point in the future? Well, prepare yourself for more comfort and convenience than ever, as the company has announced a series of improvements to its customer experience. Back in December 2014, Etihad Airways acquired a 49 per cent stake in the Italian airline, and within months the luxury United Arab Emirates brand had begun investing in improvements. In June of this year, the Alitalia brand was given a new lease of life with a new livery, while wide-body cabin upgrades were a welcome addition for regular air travellers. The latest adjustments include a new chauffeur service for premium passengers, new VIP lounges at airports, and improved customer service at Alitalia's base at Fiumicino Airport in Rome. Said James Hogan, vice chairman of Alitalia and president and CEO of Etihad Airways, "Alitalia is ascending but it still has challenges, and to maintain momentum we need to accelerate cultural and operational change at every level within the company."



ESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...STOP P



Following a disastrous 2014 harvest for Italian olive oil, the forecast for 2015 is looking good. Last year, a combination of bad weather, an infestation of olive fruit fly, and a disease called "olive ebola" caused major problems – especially in Umbria, where production fell by as much as 95 per cent. But although this year's crop won't quite match the 2013 vintage, hopes are high that it will put the industry back on track. "We will have a very good production," said Antonio Rutigliano, co-founder of award-winning producers Crudo. "It looks like we'll have a very good year by quantity, though maybe not as good by quantity."

If you're reading this issue of *Italia!* hot off the presses, there's still just about time to get to San Giovanni d'Asso for the village's white truffle fair, which takes place this year on the weekends of the 7/8th and 14/15th of November. (Ryanair fly from Stansted to Perugia at 7.40am on Sundays, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays...) But if you can't make it, don't fear – the tempting truffle treats produced by the Association of Siennese Truffle Hunters will be brought to the UK by the Tuscan Farm Shop in Burnham Market, Norfolk.

www.tuscanfarmshop.com ☎ 01328 730856



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appassionata.com



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www.appassionataboutique.com

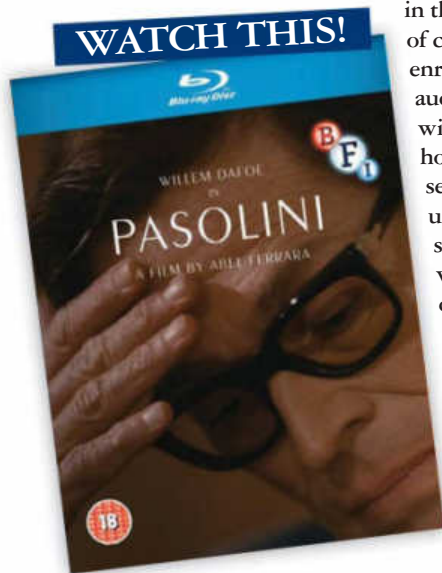
ITALIA!'S *Top picks*

Christmas hampers, sweets and chocolates, sleeping in the same bed as George Clooney (albeit not at the same time)... All this and more in **the best of Italy** this month...

THE LIFE OF PASOLINI

Fancy a break from the Christmas TV schmaltz? Look no further than *Pasolini*, Abel Ferrara's (*Bad Lieutenant*) hard-hitting biopic of controversial Italian film director Pier Paolo Pasolini. The movie follows Pasolini (played with fearsome intensity by Willem Dafoe) as he makes some of the most controversial films

in the history of cinema, enrages audiences with his homo-sexuality and ultimately suffers a violent death. Not for the faint-hearted. £9.99, www.amazon.co.uk



▲ TORRONCINI & CHOCOLATE

One of the best things about Christmas is handing round the chocs while you play the latest board games. And this box of delights is sure to get their mouths watering. Made by Autore, a small family company based in San Marco dei Cavoti, in the heart of the Campania hills, it's a selection of 32 chocolate and nougat bars, with flavours ranging from Almond & Hazelnut to Coconut and Mint. We're told that some of the recipes date back to 100BC. Let's just say they've aged rather well. £13.70, www.aromatate.com



BREWING UP WITH BUGATTI

Anything with the name Bugatti attached to it is likely to be classy, and so it is with this kettle. With its jagged design and on-handle digital controls, the Bugatti Vera oozes futuristic chic – so much so that you'll find yourself drinking more coffee just so you can go and look at it. Prefer tea? Smart settings enable you to maintain control over the temperature of the water, so you can get it just right for the infusion of your choice. The Bugatti Vera is available in six different colours. From £179, www.johnlewis.com

TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MON

Top 3 fabulous FOOTWEAR

Your grandmother will have told you that you can tell a lot about a person by **the shoes they wear**. Step out in style in these masterpieces of design...



1 FOR HER
The ladies in our office admit that they already have too many pairs of shoes in their wardrobe, but they've gone slightly dotty (sorry, we couldn't resist!) over these cute and colourful Fendi platform sandals. Crafted in Italy from white leather and wood, they feature a playful, 1960s-style polka-dot print on the heel, as well as extra cushioning at the balls of the feet for added comfort. Okay, so they're not cheap but, hey, you're worth it! £690, www.net-a-porter.com



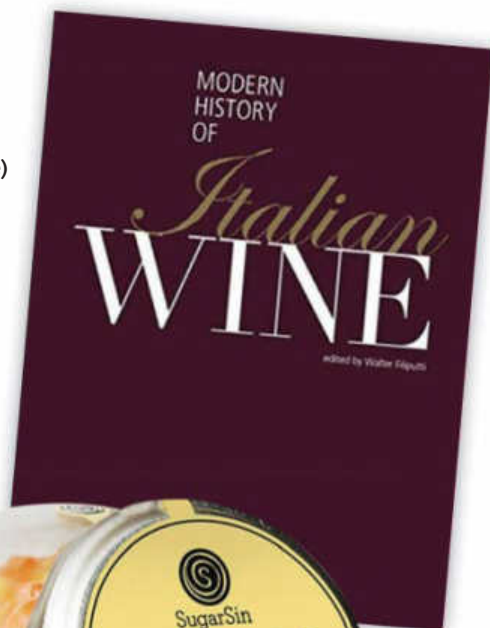
TRY THIS!

SLEEPING IN STYLE

Ever wanted to sleep in the same room as George Clooney? Well, you can if you stay at the Alcova Tiepolo suite of the Aman Canal Grande hotel in Venice – that's where the movie hunk spent his wedding night with bride Amal after their civil ceremony in the city in September 2014. Sadly, Mr Clooney won't be there during your visit, but you can admire beautiful images of a different kind, as the suite is decorated with frescoes by the Italian artist Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, generally recognized to have been one of the greatest painters of the 18th century. The cost? A mere €4,000 per night. www.grandluxuryhotels.com

ONE FOR WINE BUFFS ➤

If you're looking for a book to read on your commute to work, *Modern History of Italian Wine* (Skira Editore) probably isn't it. But weighing in at a whopping 500 pages, what this hardback tome will do is turn you into a bona fide grape guru. You'll learn all about the origins of the country's contemporary wineries (from the 1960s onwards), and how they've gone on to enjoy success around the globe. There are sections on Italian food, too, giving you the inspiration to marry delicious authentic dishes with the appropriate wine. £45, www.amazon.co.uk



EAT THIS!

GIMME MORE GUMMIES

The word 'moreish' might as well have been invented for these Prosecco Gummies, made by the aptly named SugarSin. They contain all the fizz and flavour of the luxurious Italian drink (well, almost), but are non-alcoholic, so you don't have to worry about getting drunk while you munch away at your office desk. And what's more, they come in a handy jar, so everyone can dip their hand in. (Although, do you really want to share them?) £6.50 for 280g, www.johnlewis.com



◀ XMAS HAMPER

Whether you want some delicious treats for your own Christmas table or you fancy giving someone a gift to savour, this Italian hamper from Lakeland truly delivers. You (or they) could marry the Sicilian Pesto Rosso with the Florentine *tricolore* Gigli pasta for an authentic supper, and then tantalise your tastebuds with a puff pastry Bocconcini biscuit from Verona. However it's consumed, it's safe to say that this hamper will provide a happy Christmas! £27.99, www.lakeland.co.uk

THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS MONTH'S TOP 3...THIS

2 FOR HIM

Here's a pair of shoes for the gent who likes to look elegant but casual at the same time. These vintage-inspired lace-ups from Forzieri are handmade with rich Italian leather, and finished in an eye-opening shade of blue with red detailing and beige laces. They'll look equally at home as part of a smart get-up or worn casually with a pair of tidy jeans – and they're sturdy, too, so you're sure to get longevity for your investment. £410, www.uk.forzieri.com



3 FOR TINY TOTS

Baby shoes must be among the cutest things in existence (along with curled-up hedgehogs and guinea pigs' noses), and this adorable little pair is no exception. Hand-knitted using the finest Italian Merino wool, they're as warm and comfy as they come (we're guessing here, as our little one hasn't learned to talk yet!). They're also available in grey, blue, pink or taupe, so you can match them to whatever he or she is wearing. £11.92, www.etsy.com



EVENTS IN DECEMBER 2015

In a country as deeply religious as Italy, it is no surprise that many of the season's festivals relate to **the birth of Jesus Christ**, but pagan and secular requirements are also satisfied, with fire, light, and the abeyance of dark...

TURIN CHRISTMAS MARKET

1-25 December
Turin

There simply isn't enough space here to list all the Christmas markets taking place across Italy this month, so we've plumped for one of our favourites. What better environment to get in the mood for the big day than beneath the snow-capped mountains that stand imperiously over Turin? The city takes its festivities seriously, with a giant decorated tree, countless stalls serving up warming treats and glittering crafts, and many of the restaurants offering Christmas menus.

SAINT BARBARA'S DAY

4 December
Paternò

Throughout history, Mount Etna has been feared for its volcanic eruptions. So it's no surprise that in the Sicilian town of Paternò, situated on the slopes of the mountain, they have a patron saint who they've traditionally called on to protect them. Her name is Saint Barbara (she's also the protectress of firemen and firework makers), and she's honoured every year on this day with a huge costumed parade and the erection of an elaborate nativity scene in the town.

NATALE DI VETRO

6 December-6 January
Murano

The islands of Murano, in the Venetian lagoon, are renowned for their glass-making, so it figures that their Christmas celebrations will be based around the ancient craft. Beginning on St Nicholas' Day (the patron saint of glass-blowers) and lasting a month, the *Natale di Vetro* (Christmas of Glass) sees the islands sparkle with enchanting glass decorations, including ten handcrafted chandeliers and a majestic, seven-metre-tall glass tree. And don't forget to try some 'furnace food' – meals specially prepared by the glass-blowers in their kilns.

FEAST OF SAINT AMBROSE

7 December
Milan

Saint Ambrose was a 4th-century bishop of Milan, and is now the patron saint of the city. Every year on this day he is celebrated with a public holiday and a special church service at the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio (where else?). Afterwards, thousands take to the streets around the church for the bustling Oh Bej! Oh Bej! market, where you can sample local food and drink, and browse craft stalls for that special memento.

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

8 December
Nationwide

Today is one of the most important events in Italy's Catholic calendar (and no, not just because everyone gets a day off work). The conception of the baby Jesus is celebrated with parades and special masses in churches across the country, and many towns put on extravagant feasts and live music. But unsurprisingly, it's the Pope who gets the most stately role of the day, presiding over a special ceremony at Rome's Spanish Steps.

ARTS & CRAFTS SHOW

10-13 December
Rome

If you're looking for something unique to give your family and friends this Christmas, the chances are you won't find it on your high street. Luckily, this four-day showcase arrives just in time to help you out. The massive Fiera di Roma in the capital will play host to hundreds of artisan types, who will tempt you with their finest wares, from woodwork to watercolours, crochet to calligraphy. You never know, you might even be able to do all your Christmas shopping in one go!

www.fieradiroma.it



Winter solstice is the time for fire and light.

Photograph © iStock

SAINT LUCY'S DAY

13 December

Siracusa

The celebration of this 4th-century saint coincides roughly with the winter solstice, so it's become a festival of light. While it is marked in towns across Italy, perhaps the most spectacular event takes place in Siracusa, Sicily, where a golden coffin, supposedly carrying the saint, is taken to the Church of Santa Lucia as part of a parade. On 20 December, another parade returns her to her crypt, and this is followed by a spectacular fireworks display over the harbour.

FIERA DEI PUPPI E DEL PRESEPE

13-24 December

Lecce

If you're like Clark Griswold from *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* and take pride in having the best decorations in your street, you should head down to Lecce for this delightful annual event. The streets will be lined with local craftspeople displaying their papier-mâché statuettes of characters from the nativity. Even if you have no intention of stocking up on new items for your mantelpiece or tree, it makes for a charming seasonal spectacle.

PISA MARATHON

20 December

Pisa

The middle of winter is arguably the best time to take part in a marathon – after all, who wants to run 26 miles in stifling heat? To make this annual event even more palatable, part of the route runs along the coast, so competitors can take their minds off those aching limbs by taking in the view over the Ligurian Sea. As well as the marathon itself, there's a half-marathon and even a Christmas family fun run. We dare say there'll be a few Santas in attendance! www.maratonadipisa.com

LE FIACCOLE DI NATALE

24 December

Abbadia San Salvatore
British people light bonfires on November 5th, but in the Tuscan town of Abbadia San Salvatore, they wait until Christmas Eve to get their matches out. No one is certain where this age-old tradition comes from (it's believed to be related to the chestnut forests that envelop the foot of Monte Amiata), but it's celebrated with a passion: as well as the bonfires, there's a torchlit procession and festivities going on through the night.

UMBRIA JAZZ WINTER

30 December-3 January

Orvieto

Umbria Jazz celebrated its 42nd birthday this summer, and its winter cousin is almost as well established (23 years). And it shows... For five days, the city of Orvieto will be a hotbed for jazz aficionados, who come from all over the world to enjoy over 100 performances by long-standing and up-and-coming artists. But arguably the highlight of the event will be a gospel-tinged mass in Orvieto Cathedral on New Year's Day. www.umbriajazz.com

WE RUN ROME

31 December

Rome

If there's one thing that'll make you feel like you've earned a few drinks on New Year's Eve, it's taking part in a 10k run. Now in its fifth year, We Run Rome takes in some of the city's most spectacular sights, from the Via dei Fori Imperiali to the Colosseum. There are competitive and non-competitive races, so expect to witness some true gladiatorial athleticism, as well as fun runners dressed as Roman centurions! www.werunrome2015.com

Please note that the dates of all events are subject to change. If you plan to attend, check events are going ahead before you travel. All attempts are made to present the correct details.



VIEWPOINT

The **Three Peaks of Lavarredo** – *Tre Cime di Lavarredo* – are perhaps the most photographed mountains in all of Italy, and certainly the country's most famous mountainscape scene...

The Three Peaks – Tre Cime – of Lavarredo are one of the most recognizable symbols of the Italian Dolomites. They stand on what is today the border between the Italian provinces of South Tyrol and Belluno, but until 1919 this was part of the border between Austria and Italy, and it is still a linguistic border between the German-speaking Tyrolean people to the north and the Italophones of Belluno to the south. *La Cima Grande*, the one in the middle, reaches 3,000 metres above sea level – that's nearly 10,000 feet, more than twice the height of Ben Nevis. It can be climbed, but hiking is the sport of choice here, with many tourists taking the route along the border from Monte Paterno, via Auronzo and Locatelli, to reach the peaks. ■



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LETTERS TO ITALIA!

Share your Italian experiences with us, and tell us what you would like to see in the magazine, by sending your photographs and letters to italia@anthem-publishing.com...

A RETURN TO CHILDHOOD

I first went to Agnone, the small remote town in Molise where my grandfather was raised, as a small child.

Everything about it was like a movie for me and my siblings. Both of our great uncles were Salesian priests and wore long robes and wide-brimmed hats. Our grandfather's cousins still worked the historic bell foundry – incidentally the oldest in the world – making bells exactly as they had been made in the Middle Ages. Food did not come from shops, it came straight from the garden or was collected from the farm. Life was very calm and people had time to relax with us, and engage in slow meals and leisurely walks around the town. Everyone was pleased to meet and greet us, even without a common language.

Years later, now learning Italian, I went back and discovered the perfect place to study: still no one speaks English, the artisan traditions of the town provide a rich tapestry of events and discoveries, and far from tourism, the townspeople are happy to provide endless opportunities for practice. I began to nurture and grow a community language project – cooking with the local women, visiting the artisan workshops, touring the stunning and historic countryside rich with Sannite history and nature reserves. And the town itself, living a little in the past, off the beaten track and maintaining many old traditions, offers us a wonderful backdrop for daily lessons. And – the icing on the cake – bringing small groups of visitors helps to keep the town and its traditions alive.

Jenifer Landor, via email

Thank you for your communication, Jenifer. Molise certainly is off the beaten track, at least as far as foreign tourists are concerned. The lack of airports in the region do keep it 'undiscovered'. We would love to hear more about your venture!

MONTH LETTER OF THE
DEC 2015

THE JEWELLED LADY

Reading the section on "The Jewelled Lady" reminded me of my favourite mosaic in San Apollinare, Ravenna – a photo which in the past I have used to make Christmas cards. What I like about the mosaic are the leg hose of the Magi! Do you think they would be colourful designs for today's tights? It's fascinating to think they were probably the height of fashion centuries ago and in vogue as the workmen constructed the mosaics.

Perhaps your readers would be interested in a rather unusual book about Venice? No matter how many times you visit, there is always something new to see! *Secret Venice* by Thomas Jonglez and Paola Zoffoli throws light on little known aspects of Venice, e.g. the significance of the Moors on the clock tower; the hole and the angel at Palazzo Soranzo... to quote from the Contents pages. As it says on the back page, this is an 'exceptional guide'! One year it was judged "Best Travel Guide of the Year".

There are other city guides in the series. You can find copies on Amazon.

Catherine Crehan, Rotherham

TRAVELS TO TREVISO

We have been going to Treviso for over 15 years as we have a friend that lives near there. We were happy to see your article in the July edition of *Italia!* as we would recommend anyone to go there. There are lots of good shops as well as places to eat and drink, with prices much lower than in Venice. We were there only a week ago and we happened to go to a restaurant on their opening night. Lanterna restaurant, just outside Treviso,



Our Venice correspondent Sara Scarpa visited Treviso for *Italia!* this July.

in Preganziol, has such a great menu with both seafood and meat. I can recommend the seafood as we returned twice more to try other dishes. The couple that run it are young but they are so friendly and the chef has great food ideas. We look forward to the next time we go to Treviso. The address is Lanterna restaurant, via Terraglio 53, Frescada di Preganziol.

Pat & Derek, Edinburg

COMO NOT GARDA

I am a long time subscriber from Massachusetts of Italian American heritage. I enjoy your magazine immensely. I anxiously look forward to it each month. My wife, Loretta, and I have visited Italy many times. It is our favorite destination.

I could not help but notice in this month's "Top Picks" you have a photo and brief note about the Grand Hotel Tremezzo. It is a lovely place that we have visited several times. If my memory still serves me well, I remember it being on Lake Como, not Lake Garda.

Just a minor point of clarification for your readers. Keep up the great work.

Hank Lisciotti, Massachusetts

I think you're right, Hank! Apologies. Jon Palmer

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Agnone, Molise



GAZZETTA ITALIA!

This month we welcome back our bilingual column as Anglo-Italian **Tom Alberto Bull** tells us of his adventures with friends in Venice this summer, and how they coped with the crowds...

Il Segreto Di Venezia

Mi è stato detto mille volte che era ora che visitassi Venezia, e quest'estate finalmente ho avuto l'occasione di andarci con due amici stretti e di vedere la città galleggiante con i miei occhi.

Dopo aver fatto un po' di ricerche, abbiamo deciso di risparmiare dei soldi prenotando una pensione sulla terra ferma, a Mestre. E così ci siamo trovati fronte a una scelta fra tornare verso mezzanotte oppure aspettare fino al mattino presto quando riaprono i mezzi di trasporto. Però avevamo soltanto un giorno per visitare Venezia, e siamo abituati a passare la notte in bianco ogni tanto, per cui l'idea di fare i turisti notturni era una cosa che ci attirava abbastanza.

Indubbiamente ci sono tanti motivi per cui Venezia è così amata. Quando si esce dalla stazione si rimane sbalorditi dalla bellezza che ci si trova davanti, tutta da scoprire e da vedere da vicino.

Ci è voluto poco tempo per capire che noi tre non eravamo altro che una goccia nel mare di turisti che arrivano e partono tutti i giorni dell'anno. Attraversando alcuni ponti, compreso il ponte Rialto, serviva una certa agilità per evitare di perdere un occhio sbattendo contro le aste telescopiche che i turisti usano per fare i 'selfies'. Era difficilissimo dare uno sguardo alla bella vista senza rovinare la foto ricordo di una coppia in vacanza.

La novità dei venditori ambulanti che smerciavano tutti gli stessi souvenirs di Venezia si è affievolita presto, anzi subito. I bar hanno prezzi esorbitanti, soprattutto in Piazza San Marco, dove non mi sono potuto trattenere dal controllare il prezzario di uno dei bar più rinominati – €8 per un espresso, mi bastava questo!

Ma poi, dopo aver girato la città in mezzo alla folla per ore e ore, è successo qualcosa di incredibile. Dopo mezzanotte tutti i bar chiudono, la massa di gente sparisce, e la città si trasforma in uno splendore architettonico di pace e tranquillità. Siamo tornati in Piazza San Marco, e l'abbiamo trovata deserta. Lo stesso bar che aveva i prezzi alle stelle ora ci offriva un posto dove sederci comodi, con tante sedie libere sparse per la piazza.

Sembrava che Venezia si esibiva solo per noi. Abbiamo passeggiato a zonzo per la città, stupefatti davanti a quello che trovavamo dietro ogni angolo e attraverso ogni ponte. Abbiamo scoperto per caso un'opera d'arte di strada in cui appariva un turista piuttosto grottesco che indossava una maglietta con la figura di 'Venice Land'. Certamente si trattava di un'esagerazione, ma ci sembrava cogliere il senso di tutto quello che noi volevamo evitare.

Finalmente, con le gambe stanche e gli occhi arrossati ci siamo imbarcati sul primo treno per Mestre sicuri che avevamo scoperto per caso il segreto magico di Venezia.

Venice's Secret

I have been told to visit Venice countless times, and this summer I was delighted to get the chance to experience the floating city with two of my close friends.

After some research we decided to save money by staying in a B&B on the mainland, in Mestre. This meant that we were faced with a choice of returning at around midnight or waiting until the early morning for the transport links to reopen. As we only had one day to visit Venice and are accustomed to the occasional late night, being nocturnal tourists was something we felt we could do.

There's no doubt that there are very good reasons for Venice's popularity. Walking out of the central station you are immediately taken aback by the sheer beauty that stands in front of you waiting to be explored.

It soon became clear that we were a mere drop in the ocean of tourists that come and go every day. On certain bridges, including the Rialto, it required expert agility to weave in and out of selfie sticks without losing an eye. Getting a glimpse of the view without unwittingly ruining a couple's holiday memento was a challenge in itself.

The novelty of the street vendors selling the same Venice memorabilia wears off almost immediately. The bars are generally overpriced, especially in San Marco square where I couldn't resist investigating one of the prominent bars – €8 for an espresso was all I needed to know.

But then, after hours of navigating the city amongst the large crowds, something quite amazing happened. After midnight the bars shut, the crowds disappear, and the city transforms itself into an architectural splendour of peace and tranquility. We returned to San Marco square to find it almost entirely to ourselves. The same café that was charging extortionate prices for coffee now welcomed us with its seats still spread out invitingly.

It was as if Venice had been put on display exclusively for us. We walked around aimlessly, blown away by what we would find around every corner and across every bridge. We stumbled across a piece of street art that depicted a rather grotesque tourist sporting a 'Venice Land' T-shirt. Although it was an exaggeration we felt it aptly summarised all that we were so keen to avoid.

Finally, with weary legs and tired eyes we boarded the first train to Mestre knowing that we had discovered Venice's magical secret. ■



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Homes in Cities

Italian cities get it just about right. They're usually not too big, they're always full of beautiful buildings, and they tend to favour pedestrians over motorised traffic. They're also excellent places in which to buy a property, says **Fleur Kinson...**

Italy's famously glorious countryside is rivalled in appeal only by its opposite: the nation's bewitching cities. And it's not just the best-known places that prove unforgettable. Venice, Florence and Rome astound millions of first-time visitors every year, but so do dozens of lesser-known gems such as Perugia, Trieste, Bologna and so on. Put simply, Italy does cities well. There's invariably a well-preserved historic centre, often pedestrianized, and full of interesting independent shops rather than overwhelmed with faceless chainstores. There's a strong local identity – with festivals and traditions particular to that city alone, distinctive dishes, and a specific dialect. Citizens feel loyalty to their city, take pride in it, and show the same strong sense of community we non-Italians admire so much in the nation's small towns and villages. Sure, some Italian cities are more appealing than others, but in the main it's astonishing what a high proportion of them are thoroughly beguiling places to be.

Much of what facilitates the charm, of course, is size. Italian cities tend to be rather small. Only two are home to more than a million people (Rome and Milan), while only two others even approach the seven-figure mark (Naples and Turin). The remainder of Italy's cities are tiny by comparison, which makes them feel somehow intimate and knowable. What's

more, being many centuries old, most Italian cities were designed chiefly to suit pedestrians – so they're still full of strollable spaces and streets too narrow for cars. This greatly adds to their appeal and sense of calm, and further facilitates community as strolling citizens constantly meet each other on the streets.

INVESTMENT AND ENJOYMENT

Like urban properties everywhere, homes in Italian cities are particularly good at holding their value – regardless of

vicissitudes elsewhere in the property market. This is because there's rarely a shortage of people looking to buy homes in a city, as cities offer the highest concentration of jobs. Plus, in old Italian city centres, it's usually impossible to build a stock of new homes, so housing supply will never meet demand. Thus any money you spend on an urban property is usually very safe.

Then there's the added financial advantage of rental prospects. If you're not intending to live in your urban Italian property yourself, chances are that you'll be able to rent the place out to tourists, students or visiting businesspeople. The cities you're most likely to want to buy a home in will probably be the same cities that tourists most want to visit. And you should note that tourists don't just visit Italy's cities in the summer, ➤



Busy Milan is Italy's second most populous city



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Como is an ever popular tourist destination



Beautiful Urbino has great rental prospects

but at all times of the year. For holiday rentals, an urban property is usually an even more reliable and lucrative bet than a rural one.

Investment aside, there are other good reasons to consider Italy's cities when you're thinking of buying a home in Italy. An urban property offers practical advantages for your own holidaymaking. You can fly into the city and swiftly arrive at your home there, rather than spending an hour or two driving out to a farmhouse in the countryside. Frequent short breaks can be much more viable with an urban home than a rural one.

Meanwhile, if what you want is to make a permanent move to Italy rather than merely buy a holiday home, an urban property can be advantageous too. You're less likely to be lonely in a city than in the countryside as you settle into your new life. You'll have all necessary services right on your doorstep as you learn how things are done in Italy. Plus, you're likely to find more English-speakers in a city than out in the wilds.

KEY CITIES

The big question, of course, is which city? Most readers will already know which one they love the most, which one caught their heart on a special visit and which is the one they long to explore and make their own. But if that isn't you, let's take a quick look at some of the options out there. The three most popular cities for

foreign buyers are, unsurprisingly, also the three most popular with leisure visitors – namely Venice, Florence and Rome. Naturally this makes them some of the most expensive Italian cities to buy in, but it also gives them some of the very best holiday rental returns. Each of those three cities receives millions of visitors every year, and those visitors come at all times of the year – not just in the summer.

In romantic Venice, it's possible to get a studio or one-bedroom apartment for under €200,000, although better-located ones will ask up to €300,000. Two-bedroom apartments might ask €350,000-€450,000, and three-beds €400,000-€600,000. Obviously location – and features, such as balconies, patios and views – influence price considerably. The most expensive district is San Marco, plus anywhere with a view over the Grand Canal. Popular areas with lower-priced property include





Sophisticated Turin affords access to the mountains and the coast

An urban property offers practical advantages – you can fly into the city and swiftly arrive at your home, making frequent short breaks much more viable

Dorsoduro, San Polo, Santa Croce, Castello and Giudecca. In general, a two-bedroom apartment can be rented out for about €800-€1,000 per week. The most desirable properties for rental clients are always those with charming views – rooftops or canals – and with some outdoor space.

Florence, that magnet for lovers of Renaissance art and architecture, has property prices on a par with those of Venice. You could get a decent one-bedroom apartment here for €200,000. Corso Flaccomio of the Florence-specialist estate agency Pitcher and Flaccomio notes that high-end properties in the city are currently rising in price while the rest are sinking a little in value or remaining stable.

He notes that Florence's currently least expensive areas are around Ognissanti, Palazzuolo, the San Lorenzo market and the train station, and the most expensive ones around the Piazza Signora and the Ponte Vecchio. For maximising

rental appeal, Corso recommends choosing a two- or three-bedroom apartment high up in its building. He says now is a very good time to buy Florentine property, especially apartments needing a bit of renovation inside.

THE CAPITAL

Rome, Italy's bold and confident capital, sees property prices even slightly higher than those of Venice. But Rome is a big place – it's Italy's largest city by a long way – and you could consider buying on the city outskirts in order to save money. Plenty of holidaymakers and students are more than happy to rent outside the centre, but if you do buy a home like this make sure the transport connections into the centre are good!

Lorenzo Baccin of the agency Rome Loft advises that prices in Rome have been sinking for a while but that they're expected to go no lower. (He notes, by the way, that in early 2017 Romans will

learn whether their city has been chosen to host the 2024 Olympic games, and if it is then this is likely to give a considerable boost the housing market at that time.) Currently the most expensive part of Rome is the Spanish Steps and its surrounding areas, Lorenzo says. For value-for-money, he recommends districts such as Testaccio, Trastevere and Borgo Pio, and also the prestigious Olgiata district which lies far outside Rome's centre. "Buyers hoping to rent their property to tourists should pay special attention to making it as charming as possible," he says. "Competition in the rentals market rewards apartments that are stylish yet affordable." Lorenzo also recommends considering a property that can sleep up to six people, "as there is a lack of large apartments in the tourist rental market."

If Venice, Florence and Rome seem a little too crowded or expensive for you, there are of course many other wonderful Italian cities to



Dorsoduro is one of Venice's more affordable areas

TOP TEN CITIES FOR APARTMENTS



ROME: population 2,750,000

1 Italy's brash, loud, vibrant capital is a confident, thick-skinned place, secure in its achievements and completely unsurprised to receive 12 million visitors a year. For all Rome's expense and congestion, a high proportion of ex-pats who settle down here 'for a while' never go home again. Property prices are, as you would expect, very high. Apartments range from €2,500-€5,000 per sqm, with one-bedroom places asking about €300,000 on average; two-beds about €400,000. Holiday rental prospects are excellent, as are long-term lets to students or professionals.

MILAN: population 1,300,000

2 Milan is Italy's wealthiest and probably best-dressed city. The capital of finance, fashion, design and media, this is a business-minded metropolis driven by cool-headed workaholics in razor-sharp suits. Sleek, fast-paced Milan might not be physically beautiful (beyond its dazzling *duomo*), but it offers comfort and quality at every turn. Shopping, nightlife and the arts scene are world-class, and the lovely northern lakes aren't too far away. Milan's property is pricey, with one-bed apartments asking €200,000, and two-beds about €320,000. Lots of old *palazzi* have been converted into stylish flats.

GENOA: population 600,000

3 Zesty, colourful Genoa has thrived on seaborne trade for 1,500 years and is Italy's second largest port. Eclectic in food and architecture, this cosmopolitan city stretches for miles along its cluttered shoreline, with the mouth-watering resorts of coastal Liguria never too far away. For property, Genoa can be one of the cheapest spots in Liguria, with larger properties offering particularly good value. One-bedroom apartments ask about €150,000 on average; two-beds about €230,000. Buyers hoping to let might consider long-term tenants, as well as the modest holiday rental market here.

TURIN: population 900,000

4 Enjoying relatively fresh urban air at the foot of the Alps, industrious Turin has elegant boulevards, baroque palaces, sleek boutiques and French cuisine. It's an appealing and underrated place, with a lively café scene and access to great skiing. The outskirts are dominated by characterless apartment blocks, but the centre is attractive. Property prices are quite reasonable. One-bed apartments go for €120,000 on average; two-beds about €200,000. Long-term rentals to southern Italian migrant workers or students are a better bet than short-term lets to tourists.

Property in Florence is expensive, but makes a sound long term investment choice.



PALERMO: population 650,000

5 Noisy, bustling Palermo is Sicily's capital and the island's biggest city, superbly set on a wide bay. Formerly a Mafia stronghold, it's a much improved and revitalised place these days. The city's architecture is full of exotic elements – testament to Sicily's colourful past – and there are lots of attractive old properties to be restored. Government grants can cover your restoration costs, but applications can take years to be approved. Apartments are inexpensive, starting at about €1,000 per sqm and rarely going above €2,500 per sqm. One-beds ask less than €100,000.

NAPLES: population 1,000,000

6 Magnificently set on a breathtaking bay beside a totemic volcano, Naples is an exuberant and thoroughly beguiling city. Its cheerful, free-spirited populace smiles in the face of poverty and laughs at the rules of the road. Ex-pats generally steer clear of Naples, fearing its petty crime and traffic chaos. But it's an intensely colourful spot, and handily close to Capri and the Amalfi Coast. The food is glorious and the cost of living low. Lots of people want to live here, and property is more expensive than you might expect. One-bedroom apartments in nice areas ask around €190,000 on average, two-beds about €260,000. Investors should consider long-term lets to locals.

BOLOGNA: population 380,000

7 Inexplicably overlooked by foreign tourists, Bologna is a lively and prosperous city with a striking red-brick medieval centre. Home to Italy's best restaurants and Europe's oldest university, Bologna is genial, cultured, well-paced and easy-going. It offers a very high quality of life, but living costs can be substantial. Property prices have risen steadily, and the city is considered a good investment. Long-term rental prospects from students are very good. One-bedroom apartments ask about €170,000 on average, with two-beds about €250,000.

FLORENCE: population 370,000

8 Stuffed full of exquisite paintings, sculptures and churches, Florence is a magnet for lovers of Renaissance art and architecture. The British have long adored this capital of Tuscany, and there's no shortage of them here, along with other ex-pats. Property prices in Florence are high, having long shown stable, steady growth, but the city is considered a good investment. Tourists visit at all times of the year, and there are also innumerable students to rent to. A one-bed apartment might ask €230,000; a two-bed €350,000. For all its loveliness, note that Florence can be crowded and traffic-choked.

VENICE: population 270,000

9 Often deemed the world's most romantic city, Venice is a uniquely beautiful place that never leaves you once you've visited. Crumbling, flood-prone and difficult to live in, it nonetheless draws thousands of rapturous ex-pats and millions of dazzled visitors every year. Property prices are sky-high, but holiday rental prospects superb. Prices are astronomical on the Grand Canal, and lowest near the train and bus stations, in Cannaregio, and in other less-touristy areas. Lovely old buildings are generally high-maintenance and prone to damp. Newer developments on the city's periphery can be sleek and well-designed. Expect most one-bed apartments to ask at least €300,000.

PERUGIA: population 170,000

10 Umbria's bewitching capital city is a small place – befitting this region of tiny settlements filled to the brim with history and elegant architecture. Population-wise, Perugia is only Italy's 24th-biggest city, but it deserves inclusion here because it offers such good investment. It's not overpriced, it has lots of tourists, lots of students – both giving good rental prospects – and it gives easy access to glorious surrounding countryside (where property is more expensive than in the city itself). One-beds average around €100,000, two-beds €180,000. ➤



LE CURE, FLORENCE

Type of property **Apartment**

Number of bedrooms **3**

Price **€375,000**

Location **Florence**

Contact **Casa Travella Ltd.** ☎ **01322 660988**

www.casatravella.com

This spacious, well-renovated, 3 bedroom apartment is located in the Le Cure district of the heart of Florence and forms part of a small condominium of only 4 apartments, within easy reach of all amenities and the historic sites of this beautiful city. The apartment provides some 110sqm of accommodation over 2 floors, the 3rd and loft area, with the main part of the apartment consisting of an entrance hall, open plan living room with dining area, kitchen with balcony, 2 bedrooms, bathroom, and storage room. Stairs lead to a loft area which includes a small study, bedroom and further bathroom. The property benefits from a balcony to the rear of the building, which can be accessed from the kitchen, and benefits from air conditioning and has low condominium charges. This is a lovely apartment, in the heart of this beautiful city, close to all amenities and ideal for both personal use or to provide good rental potential. Ref 3582



Florence's Ponte Vecchio reflected in the Arno



Naples has a charm all of its own

recommend. Bologna is a handsome place with a sky-high quality of life, Verona is pretty and teems with visitors, Perugia and Urbino are highly attractive and give easy access to all the delights of central Italy. (Perugia has very good holiday rental prospects plus longer-term lets available from students and visiting businesspeople.) Colourful Naples is expensive for property but with a housing shortage there are good long-term lets to be gained here.

for the whole apartment building are split between all the owners, so it's not like you'll suddenly be faced with a massive bill to repair the roof of your home – as you could be with an old farmhouse. A pre-set annual charge, the *spese del condominio*, is paid by all apartment-owners in the same building to cover the cleaning and upkeep of shared spaces such as gardens, corridors and lifts, plus the maintenance of drains, boiler room, the roof and so on.

Colourful Naples is expensive for property but there are good long-term lets to be gained here

Alternatively you might opt for exotic Palermo, the Sicilian capital. All these cities – and others – would provide you with a very appealing place to visit as well as giving you some good rental potential.

Most buyers interested in a city centre will be looking for an apartment rather than a detached property. You should rest assured that Italian apartments are extremely well-built for comfortable, long-term living. City-central buildings are often centuries-old, with thick stone walls that guard against neighbourly noise, and modern builders also plan for quiet inside their constructions. Note that a city apartment is almost always cheaper to maintain than a country house. Maintenance costs

If you're thinking about rental clients, in any city, note that certain features make a property far more attractive to them. They usually don't want to be too far from the city's centre, and they love having some outdoor space such as a balcony, patio or terrace. A charming view from the window always helps, as does characterful décor of some kind. Refurbishing your apartment before renting it is something that will repay itself in the long run. ■

USEFUL CONTACTS

www.casatravella.com
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Carol Griffiths bought a flat in the San Polo district of Venice



MY LIFE IN VENICE

Carol Griffiths recently left Ealing in London to spend a few years living in Venice. She owns a two-bedroom apartment in the San Polo district, using the second bedroom to accommodate friends and family on their innumerable visits.

What drew her to Italy, and to Venice in particular? “My family stayed in Venice for six months when I was a little girl,” Carol explains. “My father was involved in some sort of restoration project on a church; I was too young to understand exactly what it was. But I’ve always remembered those months in Venice as an utterly magical time. I played every day with a local boy named Alfonso. At first we couldn’t understand a word each other said but it didn’t seem to matter. By the time my family left Venice I could speak Italian quite well, and I still can. I’m in my sixties now, and after my husband died a few years ago I started to wonder why I was staying in London. Our children had moved to other parts of the country, and Ealing no longer seemed to have much to offer me in terms of community. So I had this mad idea. Why not move to Venice for a while? Sell the house here, buy an apartment there, and live off my savings. Why not have an adventure? So that’s what I’ve done.

“I chose the San Polo district for several reasons. It’s not far from the train station, so visitors can find me quickly. It’s not as expensive for property as some other districts. And it’s a stimulating mix of crowded tourist areas like the Rialto Bridge and quiet little lanes and piazzas full of local people. There are nice, interesting shops, and the big Rialto market. It’s impossible to feel bored here. My apartment is on the third floor of a building many streets away from the Grand Canal itself. I have a tiny roof terrace which is my favourite place to be. Thankfully I didn’t have to do any refurbishment when I moved in. I painted a few walls and updated the décor in the bathroom, but that was about it. I’ve made good friends with my neighbours, and I’m a regular at my local café, where I get to hear all the gossip. Italians are such friendly people, and it’s impossible to get lonely here. I spend a lot of time strolling the alleys and the waterside, and I have a much better quality of life than I had back in Ealing.

“And guess what. I found Alfonso! I remembered his family name and tracked him down via the wonders of the internet. He was over the moon when we got back in touch. Now I often go round for dinner with him, his wife and children.”



PIAZZA ISIDORO DEL LUNGO, FLORENCE

Type of property **Apartment**

Number of bedrooms **3**

Price **from €475,000**

Location **Florence**

Contact **Casa Travella Ltd. ☎ 01322 660988**

www.casatravella.com

This extremely spacious 3 bedroom apartment forms part of a small condominium located in the centre of Florence, in Piazza Isidoro del Lungo, which is about 500 metres from the main station of Santa Maria Novella and close to all amenities. The property, which is on the upper ground level, provides about 160sqm of accommodation and includes a double entrance, double sized living room, kitchen/dining room with spacious veranda, 3 bedrooms, and 2 bathrooms. The apartment, which would benefit from a little modernisation, is ideal as a home or even studio, has secure parking and the charges are about 330 Euros per month which includes central heating. An excellent property, right in the heart of the city. Ref 3810

Flowers for sale in Florence



The Angel of the Uffizi

Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici knew her family's vast artistic collection was of immeasurable value to Florence

Consider Mantua. Ruled by the powerful Gonzaga family for nearly four centuries, it became a famous centre of culture and art, particularly while Isabella d'Este was Marchesa there. She was a patron of the greatest artists of her time: Giovanni Bellini, Perugino, Titian, even Leonardo. By the time she died in 1539, Mantua was one of the leading art cities in Italy. People still come to Mantua for art, of course, and with good reason: Mantegna's Camera degli Sposi is there (see page 62), and Giulio Romano's witty frescoes in Palazzo Te delight visitors. These great works, however, are painted on immovable palace walls. Almost all the portable Gonzaga treasures are gone, sold in two major lots: one to Charles I of England in 1627, the second at auction in 1708.

Through the centuries, many great Renaissance art cities have lost much of their cultural patrimony, through war, looting, dynastic change, and other reversals of fortune. There is, of course, one very conspicuous exception: Florence. There, swarms of visitors crowd the rooms of the Uffizi to see the astonishing collection of masterpieces there, often standing on tiptoe to get fleeting peeks at works by Giotto, Raphael, Botticelli, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Titian and many others. The Pitti Palace, the Bargello, and the Accademia have hundreds more superb works of painting and sculpture.

And yet, there was a time when Florence's artistic abundance was in grave danger of being dispersed and scattered throughout Europe. The Medici family's long dominance of Tuscan life was nearing its end as the 18th century began. The Medici Grand Duke Cosimo III's long reign had seen the steady economic and social decline of Florence. His eldest son, Ferdinando, was syphilitic and prematurely senile. His remaining son, Gian Gastone, despised his

Gold medallion of Anna Maria, Angel of the Uffizi



The Uffizi Gallery from the Piazza della Signoria



The courtyard of the Uffizi Gallery



A caricaturist at work in the Uffizi courtyard



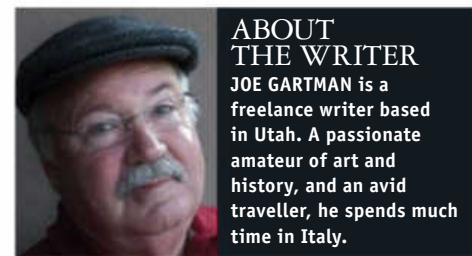
The façade of the Uffizi Gallery from across the River Arno

wife, and the feeling was decidedly mutual; so there was little likelihood of a grandson to carry on the Medici line. Cosimo knew that Gian Gastone would succeed him, so Cosimo enacted a law allowing his daughter to succeed Gian Gastone, despite her gender.

She was Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, wife of Johann Wilhelm, Elector Palatine of Germany. Since Tuscany was a fiefdom of the Holy Roman Empire, the European powers ignored Cosimo's law, and after he died in 1723, and Gian Gastone died in 1737, Francis Stephen of Lorraine (later Francis I, Holy Roman Emperor) became Grand Duke of Tuscany.

In the ordinary course of events, the House of Lorraine could have claimed, and disposed of, any of the Medici possessions, including the family's vast artistic collection. But Gian Gastone, though he'd never really liked his sister, was no fool. He left the entire collection to her, personally.

It seems a pity that Anna Maria could not have succeeded her brother; she was a woman of profound foresight. She knew her inheritance was of immeasurable value to Florence, and that she could not maintain it by herself. So she ceded it, including the burden of its maintenance, to the new Tuscan rulers, in a document called the "Family Pact" — on condition that all of it should remain in Tuscany "... as an ornament of the State, for the use of the Public, and to arouse the curiosity of foreigners." ■



ABOUT THE WRITER

JOE GARTMAN is a freelance writer based in Utah. A passionate amateur of art and history, and an avid traveller, he spends much time in Italy.

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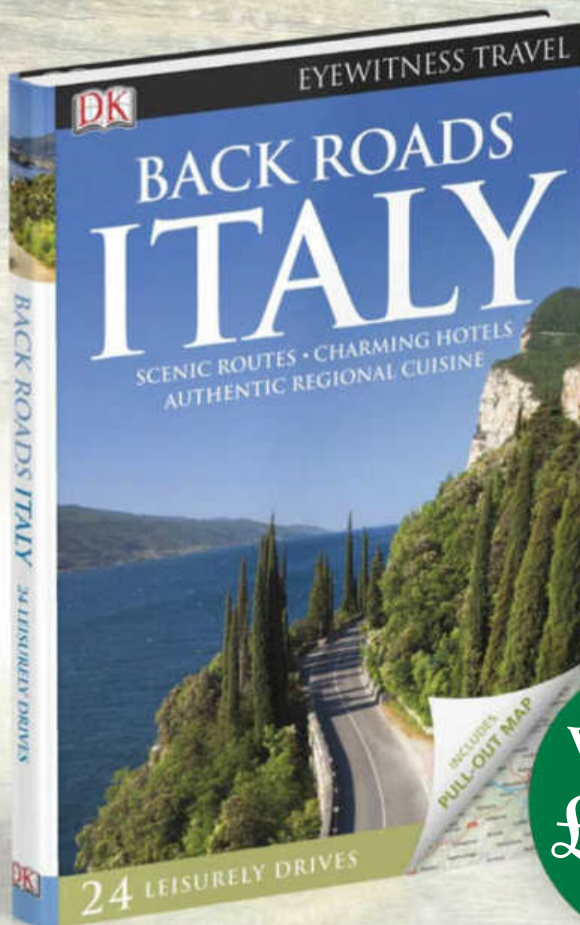
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HIM & HER



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FOR THE COFFEE LOVER

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HOME & LEISURE



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Shake up your drinks-making repertoire with this sleek cocktail shaker from Alessi, as seen in the James Bond film *Spectre*. An original design from 1923 re-released this year due to popular demand. £72, www.alessi.com



BAULI PANETTONE

It wouldn't be Christmas without panettone, and this one from Bauli makes a welcome addition to this year's round-up. It's available from Something Italian, and the good news is, if you're not a fan of panettone they also stock an impressive range of other seasonal cakes. £8.50, www.something-italian.com



CIAO LAURA CULINARY VACATIONS

Treat a loved one (or perhaps even yourself) to a culinary adventure in Italy. This is the perfect gift for any foodie traveller wishing to fully embrace Italian culture and cuisine with a tailor-made trip to Italy and cookery lessons while you are there. Ciao Laura is the premier provider of cooking lessons, cooking vacations and culinary based foodie adventures throughout Italy. See www.ciaolaura.com for details.



CHOCOLATE KISSES

Your chance to scoff some iconic Italian chocolates this Christmas. For nearly 100 years, Perugina's *Baci* (kisses) have been delighting millions around the world with their hazelnut and chocolate combination. Rather like fortune cookies, there's always the fun of finding a little paper banner inside with a quotation about love translated into several languages. Various assortments and gift boxes are available, including a sparkly Christmas tin. From £5, www.baciperugina.com

FOOD & DRINK



ITALIAN COOKERY COURSES

Master the art of Italian cooking with a course at La Cucina Caldesi in central London. Whether you want to be a wizard at pizza, pasta, fish, meat or dessert, there's a specialist course for you. Group sizes are small, with no more than 16 people, and the atmosphere is fun and friendly. Let a loved one learn the art, then let them cook for you! Courses from £40, www.caldesi.com/la-cucina-caldesi



LA VIALLA HAMPER

Robust red wines and an excellent white, all with a Tuscan 'personality' to adorn the abundant table. Celebrating organic Tuscan flavours: Pecorino and Finocchiona, Cherry Tomatoes, Olives and Capers, Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Balsamic Vinegar, pasta and flavoursome sauces, finally reaching the sweet conclusion with a Vialla Fondente, crunchy Viallini and a fragrant, whole-wheat Panettone. £90, VAT included, www.lavialla.it fattoria@lavialla.it



LUXURY PANETTONE WITH CHOCOLATE DROPS

There's nothing like some more panettone and Fratelli Camisa are supplying this one with the added indulgence of chocolate chips and a crunchy chocolate-flavoured icing. 500g, £10.99, www.camisa.co.uk



ADOPT AN OLIVE TREE FROM CASA MARGHERITA

Give a little piece of Italy this Christmas. Adopt an olive tree from Casa Margherita. Imagine tasting your very own extra virgin olive oil made from olives from your very own tree. £60 plus postage, www.casa-margherita.com



FERNET-BRANCA DIGESTIVO
Italians love to conclude a meal with a glass of *amaro* – a bittersweet tippie with an alcohol-content of around 40%. Fernet-Branca is one of the best known. £23.65, www.thedrinkshop.com



LA CERQUA

La Cerqua Ltd provides genuine Italian truffles to its customers, along with other fine artisan food products from the Le Marche and Umbria regions of Italy. Daniele's truffle hunting as a young boy and Cristine's passion for truffles led to the founding of La Cerqua with partners Douglass and Yvonne. The Company's mission is to provide the best from land to table. They are driven by a commitment to sustaining local traditions and respecting nature, and indeed all their fresh truffles and delicacies are harvested and sourced locally in the Le Marche and Umbria regions of central Italy, their home territories. They also offer a tree-planting programme which it is hoped will produce truffles. When you adopt a tree, you are contributing to the protection of the environment. On adoption you receive an adoption certificate, a map and photograph of your tree, and best of all, Giuletta's sumptuous gift box filled with lovely truffle products. www.lacerqua.com



L'AQUILA SAFFRON

Connoisseurs know that the world's best saffron comes from Italy – from the Navelli Plain near L'Aquila in Abruzzo, where villagers pick crocuses at dawn, then dry their vivid red stigmas over a wood fire to produce threads of intensely flavoured saffron. The spice is worth literally more than its weight in gold, but thankfully you only need a tiny quantity to suffuse any dish with its honeyed complexity. From £5, www.peltuinum.it



NOUGAT CAKE

Nougat is thought to have originated, if not actually in Italy, then certainly in that part of the Mediterranean, and it has long been associated with Christmas. Italy has for centuries made outstanding nougat – or *torrone* – melt-in-the-mouth soft and enriched with all sorts of added goodies. For a real show-stopping centrepiece on a Christmas buffet table, try this dazzling cake-shaped mass of nougat, more than a foot wide and studded with nuts and exotic fruits. It should see everyone munching happily throughout the holiday season. £80.50, www.nougat-nougat.co.uk

FOOD & DRINK



CHOCOLATE COVERED CIOCCOLOTTI

Brand new to Fratelli Camisa are some quite amazing chocolate products produced by the company Valentino, including these delicious Italian speciality diamond-shaped, chocolate-covered *Cioccolotti*, traditional soft cookies styled that are more of a small cake than a biscuit, and filled with dark chocolate, sweet and sharp candied fruit pieces, sweet Italian orange jam and chopped nuts. Each one is a dense, thick chocolate indulgence, rich and moreish and ideal served with an espresso or sweet dessert wine. £6.99, 400g, 8 *cioccolotti*. www.camisa.co.uk



PANFORTE

This dense, delicious confectionery from Siena is a traditional Christmas nibble served with vin santo, prosecco or espresso. Nougat-like in texture, it's an aromatic, fruity and nutty delight – packed with honey, spices, almonds and candied fruit peel. Mmmm... Addictive. Apparently, they've been making the stuff in Tuscany for 800 years. One taste and you'll understand why. £6.95, www.souschef.co.uk



RAVIOLE CUTTER

Every good cook loves a proper bit of kit, and this sturdy, square ravioli cutter will make anyone feel like a serious Italian chef. There's fun for all the family here too. Ravioli is one of the most fun pasta varieties to make – filling the frilly squares with ricotta, spinach or whatever you fancy. Give your loved one hours of fun in the kitchen – and do of course be sure they let you eat some of the results. £6, www.houseoffraser.co.uk



SARDINIAN BOTTARGA

Delight a gourmet with this intensely flavoursome bottarga – the salted, pressed and dried roe of grey mullet caught in Sardinia. Shaved, sliced or grated onto pasta, salad or plain rice, it transforms food £19, www.natoora.co.uk

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Now you can improve or maintain your Italian with *Tutto italiano*, the new, bi-monthly audio magazine for people who love Italy and the Italian language.

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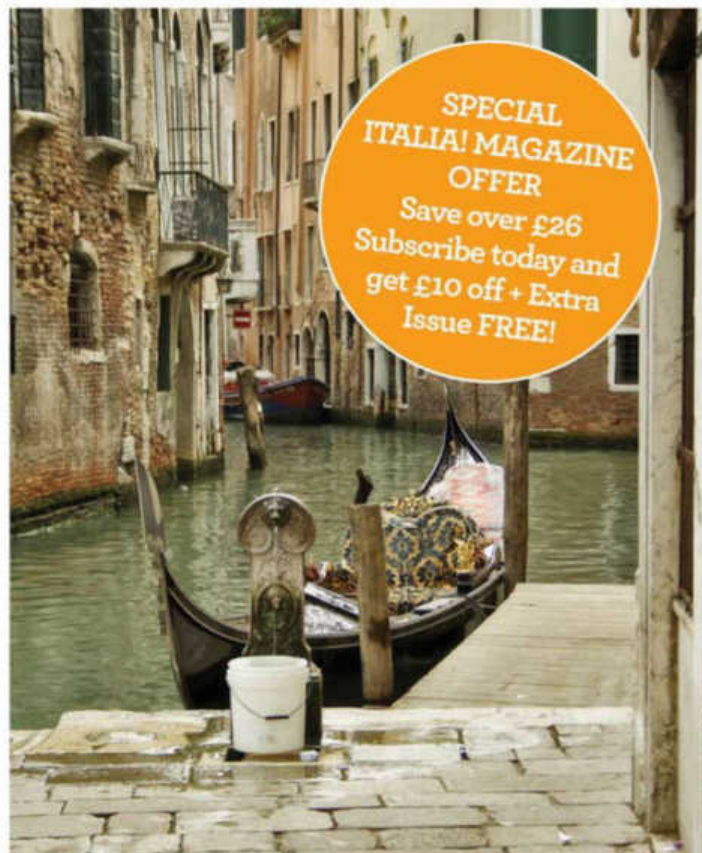
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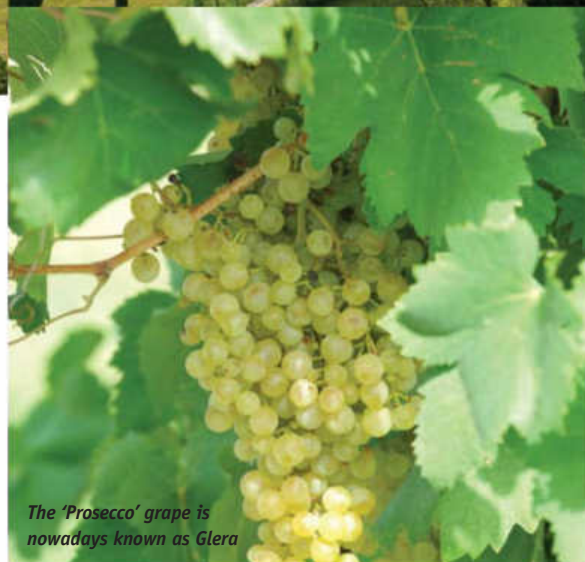


Media Ref: ITAL115

DIZZY ON THE FIZZY

Think Prosecco and you may think of Bellinis and Spritzers, but there is so much more to the wine than that, as its producers are keen to point out. **Kevin Pilley** treads the Prosecco Road in Italy's far northeast...

Versatile and easy-drinking, Prosecco can be enjoyed anywhere and at any time



The 'Prosecco' grape is nowadays known as Glera

Photograph © Prosecco Wine Road

“One for the shade,” said Francesco, handing me an *ombra* of fizzy San Giuseppe Superiore DOCG – ‘Designation of Origin Guaranteed’.

The toast was “Welcome to the Land of Joyous Bubbles!” The wine was extra brut, chilled and sparkling. The location was the 17th-century Villa Spada in Refrontolo. The scenery was the Treviso hills with their chestnut woods, hay barns and steep, south-facing vineyards.

Francesco topped me up with another *piccolo*, a small one. We admired its *perlage*, its rising pearls.

He effervesced. “Good prosecco is good for hypertension. This wine is guaranteed good. It’s from my field. Hand-harvested. Straight from the garden of Venice!”

From May to August, the Prosecco-growing region, one hour north of Venice by train and car, hosts sixteen weekend wine shows – *mostras* – and al fresco barbecues, allowing you to meet local wine

Photograph © Conegliano Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore

scientists like Francesca, and get to sample their handiwork while they speak about the highly digestible microbial population of local cheeses like Castellata. And generally talk a lot of *bollicine*, or 'bubbles'. In Prosecco country you will be forever imbibing bubbles.

THE PROSECCO ROAD

The 'Prosecco Road' is Italy's oldest wine route. It is 60km long and connects you with 120 wine producers, like Andrea Miotti in Vittorio Veneto. He graduated from the world's oldest wine school in Conegliano, the hub of the Prosecco world. The school was founded in 1876.

At the municipality's wine show in the 15th-century Todesco Palace, lady sommelier Monia Zanete did the honours. We listened appreciatively as she popped. We nosed. Andrea detected intense peach and almond primary aromatics. I struggled with pronouncing Conegliano-Valdobbiadene, where all the best Prosecco comes from. The Grand Cru is Cartizze.

"It's what's behind the label that matters," said Andrea. "Prosecco is often mislabelled. Spumante has negative connections. People think as an easy drinking wine Prosecco must be a minor wine, just sparkling supermarket plonk. Being popular, it can't be good. Drunk so young it can't be old. But it is. 700 years old. It was called Pucinum. Then Raballo. Some families have worked with the Glera grape in the Marca Treviso since 1600."

A VILLAGE NEAR TRIESTE

Between Venice and the Dolomites you quickly learn the difference between *frizzante* (semi-sparkling) and *tranquillo* (still), and to tell a Gregoletto from a Cornetto. You learn that Prosecco is named after a village near Trieste.

The *Strada del Vino* takes wine tourists past Palladian villas, built to escape Venice's mosquitos, *pieve* (churches) with murals, frescoed loggias, the 12th-century Cistercian abbey at Follina, the old Mollina Del Croda watermill and waterfall on the River Lierza, the River Piave and lots of wineries, *cantine* and *osterie* offering *cucina casalinga*.

At the Casa a Giorgio in Conegliano I received unusual pairing tips from Giorgio's son. Expecting advice on what to have with fatty entrées and marbled cheeses, Marco turned up the ambient music a notch and said, "Snails with Sting. Bee Gees with rabbit. Beer with pizza. And Prosecco with everything!"

Marco had just been to London. "£10 for a Prosecco? One glass! Ridiculous! There are many imposters about."

GLOBAL SUCCESS

Prosecco's success is global – 79 million bottles are produced every year; 47 per cent of total production is exported. The UK is second behind Germany in the European consumption table. Sixty per cent is grown in the DOC zone. Winegrowers, using the Charmat method (second fermented not in the bottle but in tanks), make on average 70,000 bottles a year. Like Spanish Cava, most are good but some are bad imitations of the real Made in Italy thing.

"Like some olive oil is only good for shaving!" said a fellow diner at Elena and Piero's Locanda Marinelli near Valdobbiadene, which hosts Italy's annual Sparkling Wine Show. On the terrace overlooking Col San Martino, we nibbled our carpaccio appetizers, truffle potato slices and prosciutto ham canapés before enjoying asparagus risotto and sea bream. Meals costs around €40, excluding wine. A bottle of proper Prosecco is €7.

At the Trattoria Alla Cerva in Vittorio Veneto the menu offered rust. Or mountain goat's beard (asparagus shoots). As well as guinea fowl and juniper, venison (*cerva*) with drowned beans and *millefoglie* custard slices.

Prosecco should be factored in as a two-day tour or a therapeutic day trip away from the perspiring queues, crammed calles, carnival mask shops, selfie stick salesmen and not great food of Venice. The area is too often ignored. Few people know where it is. Prosecco should be tasted at source. Not just at Tesco's.

As the locals will tell you over their flutes and spiedos, Prosecco is a

special place and a versatile drink. A festive drink. For breakfast, brunch, lunch, supper and dinner. It's not just an aperitif. It's not just for a Bellini or a Spritzer cocktail, but a wine on its own.

"There are many Proseccos, but only one Prosecco," said owner Riccardo, lifting his bubbles. The church bells chimed, reminding the locals of their devotions. ■

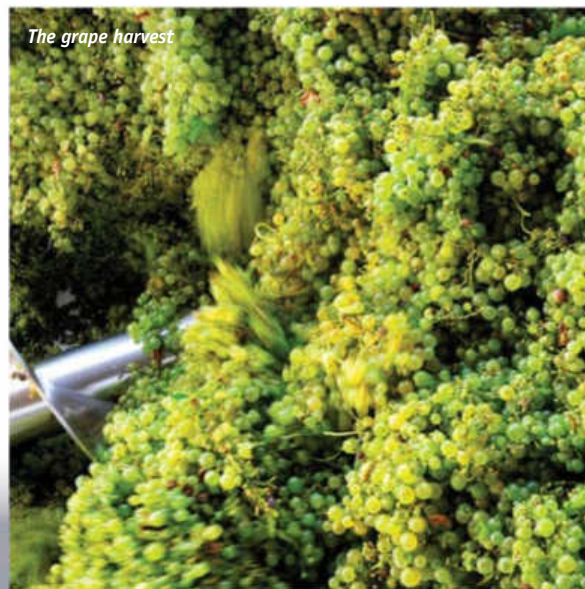
The "Prosecco Road" is Italy's oldest wine route. It is 60km long and connects you with 120 wine producers



Photograph © Mario Vidor



Classic cars trundle by ancient vines



The grape harvest



INFORMATION

➤ For more about Prosecco breaks contact info@primaveradelprosecco.it, prenotazioni@primaveradelprosecco.it (for bookings). www.primaveradelprosecco.it, www.prosecco.it

GETTING THERE

➤ **BY PLANE**
EasyJet flies to Venice Marco Polo from London (Gatwick, Luton and Southend) and Manchester with fares from £20.99 one-way. Try Gatwick and Heathrow Yotels within terminals. Prices start from £32 for a standard cabin for four hours and go up to around £85 for premium cabin overnight. You can book check in and out any time 24/7. Book online at www.yotel.com

DISCOVER ITALIA!



Clockwise from top left: Ramona, my volunteer Ortigia tour guide; shopping activity in Taormina; the coastline at Siracusa; Taormina locals finding time and space; the Trinacria, a symbol of Sicily; Ortigia fish market; the Hotel San Domenico; a barbershop in Ortigia



48 HOURS IN...

Siracusa & Taormina

James Miller travels the east coast of Sicily to discover two cities rich in ancient history and vibrant with modern life...

The Roman statesman and scholar Cicero described Siracusa as “The greatest Greek city and the most beautiful of them all.” In ancient times Sicily was once part of Magna Graecia, or Greater Greece, and Siracusa was an influential and important city in Europe’s Hellenistic period. I have seen much of Sicily on my Italian travels, but Siracusa had been on my list of must-see destinations for years. I was on a trip to explore two towns on the eastern side of the island, Siracusa first, then Taormina. As I followed the beautiful coastal route along the northeast of the island I was eagerly anticipating the experiences that awaited me.

It was late afternoon and after a long journey from the capital, Palermo, I finally arrived at Ortigia, Siracusa’s historic centre, which, curiously, is an island in its own right. After checking into my home for the night, the perfectly located Hotel Des Etrangers, I headed straight to the centre of the city, the Piazza Duomo, famous for being the most beautiful baroque piazza in Sicily. It has been used as a film location for Italian masterpieces such ➤



Photography © James Miller unless otherwise stated



WHAT TO SEE AND DO

SIRACUSA ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM ❶

Viale Teocrito, 66 – Siracusa

☎ +39 0931 489511

www.regione.sicilia.it/beniculturali/museopaoloors

No trip to Sicily is complete without an insight into the history of this island. Explore the ancient treasures of Siracusa by taking a wander around the archaeological museum, where you can find magnificent artefacts wonderfully displayed from the Neolithic to Roman periods. The museum in its present location opened in 1988 and is located in what had been until then an underdeveloped part of the city.

THE FOUNTAINS OF DIANA AND ARETHUSA ❷

Piazza Archimede, Ortigia, Siracusa

Largo Aretusa, Ortigia, Siracusa

Walk through Ortigia's Piazza Archimede and enjoy the baroque beauty of the fountain of Diana. Once you've taken in the splendour of the Piazza Archimede, take a stroll across town and you'll find the fountain of Arethusa and its natural spring, inhabited by swans and carp, the perfect resting place during your sightseeing.

PIAZZA DUOMO ❸

Ortigia, Siracusa

Relax and people watch in the Piazza Duomo, which has been described – and not just by myself – as one of the most beautiful piazzas in Sicily. With its stunning baroque buildings and ancient cathedral this is the perfect location from which to observe the Italian tradition of the *passeggiata* in the evenings.

THE GREEK AMPHITHEATRE ❹

Taormina

The Greek Amphitheatre of Taormina, *il teatro antico di Taormina*, is a real gem. The €10 entrance fee is well worth paying, as the theatre gives spectacular views out to Mount Etna and the sea. The Amphitheatre was used as a location for Greek theatre and later for Roman gladiatorial battles. An absolutely unforgettable experience.

THE GARDENS OF THE VILLA COMUNALE ❺

Taormina

If you have time (and unless you really are a true horticultural enthusiast you probably don't if you're here on a weekend break) a day in the gardens of the Villa Comunale will be peaceful and restful. The gardens were originally developed by one Lady Florence Trevelyan, who was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne but who, upon the death of her mother, toured Europe with a cousin, discovered Sicily and never returned to England. The gardens are her legacy.



Ortigia's Piazza Duomo at night

DON'T MISS

THE EAR OF DIONYSIUS

The Ear of Dionysius, *il Orecchio di Dionisio*, is a cave carved out of the limestone hillside in Siracusa. It was dug in ancient times as water storage for the city and although its visual similarity to a human ear is coincidental, it does have extraordinary acoustic properties.

as *Malèna*, Giuseppe Tornatore's war-time classic starring Monica Bellucci as a tragic war widow, isolated and mistreated by the local women.

As I walked up to the piazza I could certainly see why this enchanting open space, encircled by buildings with stunning Classical architecture, was certainly cinematic and evoked a sense of drama. However, I felt anything but isolated and tragic in this

middle of the piazza created an ambience that just completed the moment. Later the guitar music was replaced by an opera singer, bellowing out famous Italian arias.

The piazza's showpiece is the magnificent baroque cathedral. The cathedral has evolved through a number of incarnations. Originally a 5th-century temple dedicated to the goddess Minerva, it was later developed by the Byzantines and then the Normans. I sat and gazed

As I walked up to the piazza I could certainly see why this was selected as a film set

incredible space – the piazza was buzzing with tourists and children playing, creating an ambience and an urge to stay. I acted upon this impulse by sitting in one of the cafés lining the piazza and enjoying a couple of glasses of delicious local white wine. The experience was one of contentment and serenity, complemented by the melodic and moody strumming of a talented guitarist. This maestro in the

in awe at the detail of the huge Corinthian columns that flanked the cathedral's façade.

After lunch I decided to explore the area further and wandered through the narrow Ortigian streets, each one more attractive than the last. These back streets are quite unique with their characteristic Sicilian baroque architecture and captivating balconies that are clearly a source of local pride.



Cannoli in Siracusa



Ortigia Cathedral



Guitarist in the Piazza Duomo



The wedding party

Later that evening I ventured into some of the bars to sample the local nightlife. I found myself chatting to a fellow countryman who had visited Sicily and decided to make his home here. I asked him what Sicily offered him that Britain didn't. His answer was simple and profound: "Sicily offers me time – and space."

I was then drawn to the gloriously raucous music from a nearby club which is where I met the charismatic and talented singer Ramona, something of a celebrity in the local music scene. Typical of Sicilians, Ramona was generous of spirit and delighted to meet someone interested in her culture, offering to be my tour guide the next day.

That night I walked back through the piazza. Despite the rain, it had lost none of its beauty. The splashes on the paving illuminated by the soft street lights and warm orange glow of the baroque buildings created a spellbinding interplay of water and light.

My stay at the Hotel Des Etrangers was perfect, the décor was elegant and the room spacious and comfortable. I awoke to the

drama of lightning flashes from an uncharacteristic storm across the harbour, but the comfort of the hotel ensured I was asleep again in no time and ready to face the next day with my tour guide, Ramona.

The weather had cleared up. It was bright and sunny when I met Ramona at the appointed place, the Cannoli del Re kiosk. What a way to start the day, Sicilian style: *cannoli* and coffee. Ramona greeted me like an old friend and off we went.

We walked across the Piazza Duomo and spotted a newly-wed couple parading their marital happiness to the tourists. The bride looked stunning and the groom was beaming, the term *fare la bella figura* had never been more apt.

Ramona is larger than life and she cherishes her beloved Sicilian culture. We walked past the ruins of the 6th-century BC Temple of Apollo, a spectacular sight that Ramona pointed out was the first Doric temple in Sicily. Our next stop was the market place, the Mercato di Ortigia.

Ramona was greeted by the market traders, particularly the

DON'T MISS

IL CORSO UMBERTO
This thoroughfare in Taormina will take you to many of the city's principal sights and shopping opportunities. The road is pedestrian-friendly too, so feel free to amble at your leisure.

WHERE TO STAY

SAN DOMENICO PALACE HOTEL 6

Piazza San Domenico, 5 – Taormina

☎ +39 0942 613111

Res.sandomenico@amthotels.it

www.san-domenico-palace.com

Formerly a monastery, this hotel epitomizes luxury, indulgence and old world glamour. The hotel staff maintain a standard of customer service excellence that ensures visitors are compelled to return. The hotel has three restaurants a garden that is positively Eden-like, and the rooms and suites are sublime. Without doubt one of the best hotels in Italy.

DES ETRANGERS HOTEL AND SPA 7

Passeggio Adorno, 10/12 – Siracusa

☎ +39 0931 31900

fo.desetrangers@amthotels.it

www.desetrangers.com

Situated in prime position overlooking Siracusa's harbour this hotel has elegance and style in the fashion of a bygone age of European glamour. The rooftop restaurant commands excellent views and the rooms are tastefully decorated and spacious. Highly recommended.

GRAND HOTEL ORTIGIA 8

Viale Mazzini, 12 – Siracusa

☎ +39 0931 464600

info@grandhotelortigia.com

www.grandhotelortigia.it

Constructed in the late 19th century, this hotel boasts a fascinating history. Nowadays it is a popular 5-star hotel that has a range of services, including its own small museum and a private beach. The interior is elegant and the staff attentive.

ALGILA ORTIGIA CHARME HOTEL 9

Via Vittorio Veneto, 93 – Siracusa

☎ +39 093 146 5186

info@algila.it

www.algila.it

This boutique hotel's stylish but exotic décor and intimate feel makes staying here a pleasure. Centrally located and with amazing views, the Algila Ortigia Charme has lots to offer. The prices are very reasonable, this is a great alternative to some of the larger hotels in the area.

HOTEL VILLA SCHULER 10

Via Roma, Piazzetta Bastione, Taormina

☎ +39 0942 23481

info@villaschuler.com

www.hotelvillaschuler.com

The Villa Schuler has been family-owned for three generations, starting in 1905. This hotel offers a delightful stay in the tranquillity of sub-tropical gardens and in the comfort of a beautifully styled historic villa. The staff are extremely friendly and offer a great service. The hotel is centrally located and has heaps of character.

WHERE TO EAT

CASEIFICIO BORDERI 1

Via Emmanuele de Benedictis, 6 – Siracusa

☎ +39 0931 463253

I discovered this place thanks to my guide, Ramona, who knows Siracusa like the back of her hand. And it is definitely worth a visit. The owners take immense pride in the flavours, produce and spectacle of preparing food for their clientele. It is quite famous in the local area – and for good reason. The food is absolutely delicious. Try one of their *panini* and I guarantee you will not be disappointed.

€

DA SALVO 12

Via dei Candelai, 35 – Siracusa

☎ +39 0931 22553

Nicely decorated interior, great service, the food is sublime... This restaurant seems to have it all. The seafood is absolutely delicious and the wine is exquisite. Try this restaurant to experience culinary delights with local produce and creative cooking with flair and a smile.

€ €

REGINA LUCIA 13

Piazza Duomo, 6 – Ortigia, Siracusa

☎ +39 093 122509

This restaurant gets rave reviews from its clientele. It has great views to the Duomo and the ambience is charming. The food is exquisitely prepared and the Regina Lucia has a reputation in Ortigia as excellent value for money. The pasta dishes are well worth trying!

€ €

THE PRINCIPE CERAMI 14

Piazza San Domenico, 5 – Taormina

☎ +39 0942 613111

Under the maestro Chef Massimo Mantarro, the Principe Cerami never fails to deliver on quality. The restaurant has a well-deserved 2 Michelin stars. With captivating views to the Ionian Sea, the atmosphere this restaurant evokes is spellbinding. The food is truly outstanding and the service is flawless. For true gastronomes this restaurant is a must.

€ € €

BARONESSA 15

Corso Umberto I, 148 – Taormina

☎ +39 0942 628 191

www.ristorantebaronessa.it

The Baronessa has much to offer the discerning diner. The classical décor and exemplary service combined with the amazing food and terrace views make this restaurant one of the best in Taormina. This restaurant has the appearance of a Palazzo and when dining here you'll feel like a Sicilian noble!

€ €



DON'T MISS

TAORMINA FILM FESTIVAL

If you're lucky enough to be able to visit Taormina during the film festival you'll be able to experience the true Italian glamour. Screenings take place at the amphitheatre and the town is awash with Hollywood royalty. Well worth a visit at this time of year although the streets are full of celebrities and their entourages.

► **KEY TO RESTAURANT PRICES**
(full meal per person, not including wine)

€ Up to €25
€ € €26-€50
€ € € More than €50

traders in the Pescheria Fratelli Cappuccio. One of the Cappuccio family, a rotund, moustachioed, jolly man broke into song when he saw and gave her a big hug. Born and bred in Ortigia, Ramona is a daughter of the city, warmly greeted where ever she goes. I had been very fortunate in finding a tour guide who was so much part of the fabric of the local culture.

Next Ramona took me to the wine bar Solaria where, unsurprisingly, she was friends with the staff. We sat and talked about life, love and loss. Ramona has a vibrant career singing in the clubs and bars of Siracusa. She explained that despite the travelling her career offers, when she is out of Ortigia she feels like a fish out of water.

Ramona then took me to the one of Ortigia's most famous destinations, the extraordinary Fountain of Arethusa, a freshwater spring that flows to the sea. The fountain has papyrus growing in it and is the home to a number of carp, one of which Ramona took a great interest in due to its recent growth spurt – this carp was obviously part of the local community!

She enthusiastically explained the Greek legend attributed to the fountain's origins. Arethusa was a nymph who was transformed into a spring to escape the amorous advances of Alpheus, son of the god Oceanus. After my lesson in Greek mythology we opted for a caffeine break. Ramona insisted I be an Ortigian for the day and therefore the English custom of tea was banned in favour of espresso!



Sat relaxed, movie-star shades on looking out to the sea, Ramona seemed to be completely in her element. "There are many places in Siracusa and Ortigia to think about life and reflect," she explained as she stared out to the harbour. It was clear to me that Ramona belonged to a tight-knit community with old world values and an appreciation for the simple pleasures life offers, in a sense shielded from the complications and pace of city life.

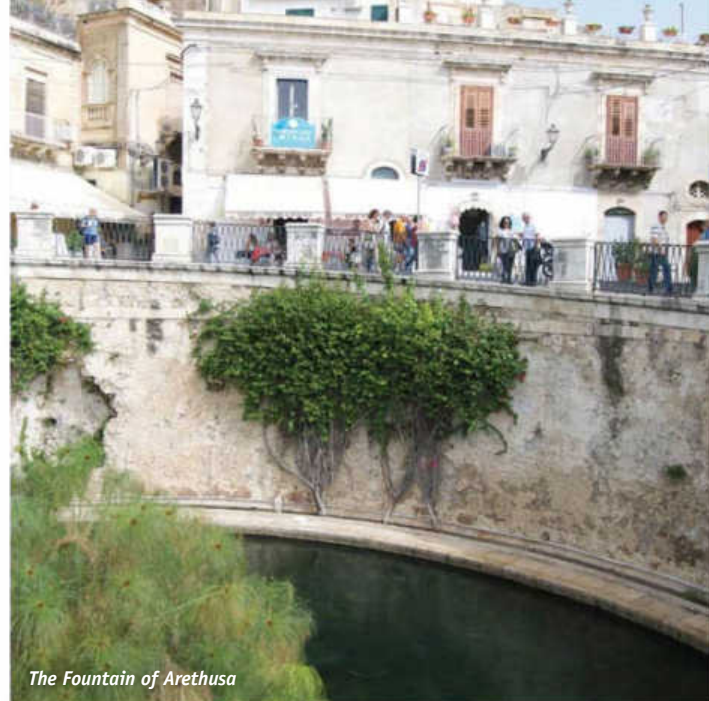
The next destination was the old fish market that had been transformed into an antiques emporium for the day. We looked at some beautiful old furniture and relics of Ortigia's past, such as a local car registration plate from an era when cars were a novelty.

After a day of hitting Siracusa's streets, we were ravenous. Ramona knew just the place, the Caseificio Borderi. Caseificios are traditionally a dairy or creamery, however the Famiglia Borderi have what can only be described as a delicatessen that is a treasure trove of local produce. We stood and chatted to one of the owners as he made a mountain of a *panino* for us to share, it was chock full of delicious local ingredients. Ramona was passionately discussing with him the characteristics of each ingredient and how they all fuel the body and soul in their own way. This was artisan gastronomy at its best! We sat and enjoyed the *panino* with a couple of glasses of local wine. Conversation was limited to mere sounds of appreciation whilst we savoured the feast.





Happy fish salesmen



The Fountain of Arethusa

I said my goodbyes to Ramona and we vowed to keep in contact, “You now have a friend in Ortigia!” she told me. And I was on my way to experience another one of Sicily’s charming towns, Taormina.

After an exhilarating evening drive I arrived at the San Domenico Palace hotel in Taormina. The illuminated entrance to the former monastery and now famously sumptuous hotel sets the scene perfectly for a stay in absolute luxury. I was shown to my suite that night and was quite simply blown away. The spacious suite was elegant, luxurious and looked resplendent, with classical artwork and furniture that had been impeccably chosen to match the grandeur of the room. I walked onto the balcony and could see fireworks igniting the coastline.

The San Domenico experience tends to make guests feel like they are occupying a scene in their own film. This was one of those moments. After enjoying a rested night in the decadence of my suite I enjoyed breakfast on the terrace whilst taking in views of the endless blue of the Ionian Sea. After breakfast I took a stroll around the hotel’s Italian garden – rare plants and explosions of colourful flowers, vistas out to Mount Etna and the sea. Reluctantly, I checked out of the San Domenico and decided to take in some of Taormina’s famous sights before heading back to Palermo.

Taormina is a hill top town known for its charming combination of ancient sites, natural beauty and classical glamour – so much so they

stage the annual Taormina Film Festival here, where luminaries such as Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie enjoy the string of beautiful piazzas that make up the main thoroughfare of the town’s centre. As I walked through the town centre, I could see why Taormina has a reputation of being something of a paradise – hanging baskets, beautiful balconies, quaint side streets with restaurants and bars. This was without doubt one of the most attractive towns I had visited in Italy.

Before leaving I visited the Greek Amphitheatre. The sense of drama this evoked was epic. The ancient seats offered views straight out to Mount Etna and the Sicilian coastline, a perfect location from which to accentuate the drama of the Greek tragedies of Antiquity played out here, and the bloodthirsty gladiatorial battles that took place under Roman rule.

Readying myself for the journey home I contemplated my time in Taormina and Siracusa and remembered the man I had met in Siracusa and what he said Sicily offered him: time and space. I made a personal pledge to find the time and space in my life to return. ■

GETTING THERE

► BY PLANE

I flew to and from Palermo, but you will be doing yourself a favour if you can get to Catania instead. There are direct flight from Birmingham, Bristol, Dublin, London Gatwick and Luton, and Manchester. Failing that, Comiso (from Dublin or Stansted) is another option.



The Greek Amphitheatre



The San Domenico Palace Hotel

Titian sees the light

It would take Titian the generation following Giovanni Bellini to really exploit the full potential of oil. He digested the expertise of Bellini and then took it to another level.

Titian (Tiziano in Italian) was one of the greatest painters Venice ever produced – perhaps *the* greatest painter Venice ever produced. He was the first truly international European superstar artist. During his very long life (he died in his mid-90s) he worked for the Duke of Ferrara, the Dukes of Urbino, the Medici in Florence, the Popes, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and the King of Spain, Philip II. He was knighted by the Emperor (he became a Knight of the Golden Spur), he received various stipends from international leaders (he was a shrewd businessman too), and for almost 60 years he held the title of Official Painter of the Venetian Republic.

As an artist he was innovative, imaginative and a true colour engineer. At an early age, in the beginning of the 1500s, he was an apprentice under Giovanni Bellini, who headed the most important workshop in Venice at the time and was himself then the Official Painter of Venice. Giovanni Bellini had learned the oil technique from the Sicilian Antonello da Messina, who in turn had learned it from northern European painting. Antonello had lived just over a year in Venice during the mid-1470s and introduced the oil technique to the Venetian artists. Bellini, already a master painter producing beautiful work in egg tempera, had recognised immediately the possibilities of oil and, being innovative and receptive to change, he dedicated himself to exploring its potential.

Bellini became a master of glazing (the layering of colour, possible only when the pigment is mixed with oil), and he achieved a translucency and luminosity of colour that had been simply impossible in egg tempera painting. He would build up possibly dozens of extremely thin layers of the same colour (like panes of glass) in



Clarissa Strozzi
(Clarissa de' Medici)



Self portrait



Charles V at
Mühlberg



King Philip II
of Spain



Madonna and Child



L'Assunta

slightly differing shades, creating a prism-like effect on the surface with the pigment. The light would enter the layers of the paint and bounce off the white ground surface and return back. The end result was a deep inner colour glow from within the very image itself. This was especially effective when depicting the blue robe of the Virgin Mary or a gold mosaic apse in the background.

It would take Titian, however, the following generation to really exploit the full potential of oil. He digested the expertise of Bellini and then took it to another level. Bellini had experimented with luminosity but remained for the most part within the contours of the outline of the drawing from the traditional Renaissance detailed preliminary drawing executed beforehand. Titian, however, was the first to free up painting entirely from any formal hierarchic planning of the painting. As the oil medium was slow drying, unlike with egg tempera, he could be innovative and spontaneous directly onto the canvas and build up the surface, creating volume and atmosphere with differing surface texture and manipulation of hues, because there was room to rework and change anything that was done.

The basic unit of tempera painting had been line, and the essence of oil painting was surface and atmosphere. Line and drawing (*disegno*) was the basis of the Florentine artistic school and they maintained that excellent draughtsmanship was the only way to best represent nature, movement and anatomy. The basis of the Venetian school was colour (*colorito*) and they believed that the pulse of life and the true nature of the world was best expressed in art through the ability to utilise colour and light. Titian was the great innovator of the painterly style; no other had ever used brush strokes and colour with such mastery to convey action, power, emotion and sensuality. Whether it was flesh in his female allegories and mythological paintings or portraiture or religious paintings, Titian's genius was his capacity to convey the very mood of the painting through colour. ■



ABOUT THE WRITER

FREYA MIDDLETON is a private tour guide and writer who lives in Florence, Tuscany. You can read her blog online or learn more about her tours at www.freyasflorence.com

Photography © Freya Middleton unless stated

DISCOVER ITALIA!



Slow Adventures in Piedmont





The bi-annual Slow Food Cheese Festival returned to the small Piedmont town of Bra this September. **Chris Allsop** stopped by to try some of Italy's finer and some of its more unusual cheeses, and to venture beyond Bra to take advantage of the lack of crowds in the neighbouring area...



Images, clockwise from top left: Langhe sheep, an endangered breed; the notorious cacio marcatto cheese; Dogliani, the dolcetto growing region; at a taste workshop; the streets of Bra during the Cheese Festival; Slow Food petition against powdered milk; all aboard the Cheese bus!

We are in the baroque town of Bra in Piedmont on a warm

and sunny September weekend and there's a rumour flying about that one of Italy's "illegal cheeses" is available for tasting. This isn't a random happening; the third weekend of September, every other year, sees the town's skinny streets clogged by Cheese, a Slow Food festival for – yes, you guessed it – milk's leap towards immortality.

The event is a physical manifestation of the Slow Food credo: "promoting the pleasure of food, based on taste and knowledge". There are Taste Workshops (the event is free, but the workshops cost extra); talks with artisan producers; live bands. It's probably the best food festival I've ever been to, due to its ebullient atmosphere, stunning surroundings, and matchless selection of cheese and related cuisine. And let's not forget the illegal cheeses...

It's no accident that the event happens in Bra, swelling the population from 30,000 to 270,000 over the course of a long weekend (if you plan to stay in Bra try to book your accommodation at least six months in advance). This is Slow Food country, where the now international organised reaction against fast food culture has its roots (there's even the University of Gastronomic Sciences (UNISG), established by Slow Food founder Carlo Petrini, in the next town of Pollenzo). And it's also natural for the event to be taking place in festival-mad Piedmont, home to the International White Truffle Festival in October as well as the less well known (but no less necessary) Festival of the Mother-in-Laws during the last weekend of September.

TIDE OF TUROPHILES

Cheese! is a wonderful place to engage with Piedmontese and Italian cuisine in general, and to taste a vast array of top-notch artisan foodstuffs in a single location. Italians are the predominant demographic, but you'll find an international tide of turophiles (that's cheese lovers to me and you) pouring

in to dawdle in the Pizza Piazza, loiter in Affineur Avenue, or grovel in the Great Hall of Cheese.

At one semi-circular stand dedicated to the Valle d'Aosta, you could try 14 different examples of *fontina* cheese, noting how the taste varies depending on the altitude of the various producers. Overkill it may be, but that doesn't really come into the thinking of an organisation that drops lines like "the noble work of shepherds" into their promotional material without batting an eyelid. Every small producer is of interest to Slow Food, and to leave some out would defeat the object of the whole affair.

En route to my 'Italian Spirits Meet Blue Cheese' taste workshop I walk past some of the 300 exhibitors offering tastes of rare and delicious cheeses. The sharp scent of Parmesan mingles with others less easily identified. Several tables offer Alpine Castelmagno, perhaps Piedmont's greatest (and one of its rarest) cheeses. Aged for 14 months, it's starting to resemble grey coral at the edges, surrounding an ivory centre. I swipe a nugget from the cheeseboard; it's like turbo Caerphilly, sharp and savoury, with a subtle lemony flavour.

I'm now sitting in a medieval church with five cheese wedges on a paper plate before me. Waiters pour different Italian liquors into a series of wine glasses while, over my earphones, I receive the translation of what the Italian booze purveyors facing the audience are saying. An Italian gin producer is boasting that, after the British tried his gin, they came over and "bought up all the juniper in the area". I get used to the command: "please smell it, now put in your mouth", and enjoy ➤



WHERE TO EAT

RISTORANTE LA CROTA

Via Fontana, 7 – Roddi d'Alba

☎ +39 0173 615187

www.gigatecnologie.it/lacrota

Modern meets traditional in the highly rated Crota. With a reassuringly extensive wine cellar visible through the glass in the floor, the menu offers typical Piedmontese cuisine stylishly served. The salty grilled anchovies in a light batter are a more-ish starter, while the *lasagne* with mushroom and black truffle makes for a little unctuous parcel of delight. Watch out for the local Pelaverga wine – it divides opinion.

OSTERIA DEI CATARI

Via Solferino, 4 – Montforte d'Alba

☎ +39 0173 787256

www.osteriadeicatari.com

On a sunny day, there's no better place to be than on the terrace of the Osteria dei Câtari, surrounded by bright hanging baskets brimming with flowers. This popular spot, up some steps off a side road, offers well executed Piedmontese specialties. The classic tuna-stuffed roasted peppers are wonderful here.

TRATTORIA DA FRANCESCO

Via Vittorio Emanuele, 103 – Cherasco

☎ +39 339 8096696

www.latrattoriadafrancesco.com

Perhaps the most elegant dining room in the Langhe, at Trattoria da Francesco you sit surrounded by original frescoes mottling the walls. Upmarket and also casually intimate, the new restaurant of chef Francesco – who first made his reputation in Bra – offers superbly executed cuisine that plays with textures and subverts expectations. It's also a fine place to try Cherasco's snails, a local speciality.





Images, left-hand page, clockwise from top left: English cheese is represented by Neal's Yard Dairy; the event is as much about education as it is stuffing your face with cheese; cheese lovers fill the streets of Bra; some Alpine Castelmagno; vending stall; having enjoyed a tippie at the taste workshop; festival sign; skyline view from the festival. Inset, this page: Slow Food founder and Bra native Carlo Petrini

mixing the flavours of a spicy eight-month old Gorgonzola with a light and fruity rum from Alto Adige.

The town and the festival have an easy symbiosis and those few locals who aren't joining in enjoy watching the carnival from their usual seats in the *caffè*. But I'm sure there are a few who grouse about how the roads are cut off on Saturday and Sunday – which isn't to say you can't reach the festival if you're not staying there as the organisers run a free shuttle bus service from a number of stops outside the city. There is a certain satisfaction about stepping into a bus advertising its stop as 'Cheese'.

As for the illegal cheese, well, I got there in the end. At the UNISG stand, where a talk on illegal cheeses was taking place, I'm told by a student in a yellow T-shirt that I can't buy any, "but you can taste *cacio marcatto* at stand B55".

Cacio Marcatto is a sheep's milk cheese from Abruzzo. Otherwise known delightfully as *formaggio con i vermi* (cheese with maggots), it is one of a number of Italian cheeses that are actually illegal to sell due to their contravention of food hygiene laws. As such, the cheese and its ilk – the famous *casu marzu* (rotten cheese) from Sardinia or the Piedmontese *bross ch'a marcia* (cheese that walks) – are tricky to find.

However, thanks to the educational remit of the event, a round of *cacio marcatto* was admitted by special permission for those interested in partaking of a cheese softened by the action of maggots working their way through the milky flesh. And indeed, as I arrive at B55, I'm delighted to find the hollowed out cheese awaiting me. The kind Mauro scrapes some crumbs onto a piece of bread for me and hands it over. The initial mellow sheep's flavour gives way to a bitterness that settles into my molars for the next hour. As I make a beeline for the craft beer tent, I realise I forgot to ask: is this the cheese where they scrape the tiny maggots out first, or is this the one where they're left in to add to the flavour?

BEYOND CHEESE

If you feel like busting out of Bra for a while, Cheese can be done



in one intense day trip, leaving you time enough, even on a long weekend break, to uncover more of the Langhe region's delights. For example, while the Cheese Festival is on in Bra is the perfect time to set off to explore the neighbouring town of Cherasco.

A former medieval city-state with a rich history, Cherasco offers plenty for the curious tourist (including, randomly, Europe's only Museum of Magic other than the one in Paris). Of particular cultural note is the Palazzi Gotti di Salerano with its beautifully maintained 1672 frescoes, while a noteworthy culinary stop is the historic Pasticceria Barbero, where you can tuck into some fabulous Cherasco Kisses – hazelnuts covered in quality dark chocolate (interesting little fact: they eat more dark chocolate in sophisticated Piedmont than in the rest of Italy combined). Best of all, the shop owner's last name is Torta – nominative determinism of the month or what?

While the temptation will be to drink Barolo and Barbaresco for breakfast, lunch and dinner (the Langhe being home to the namesake towns of the famous red wine varieties), think Slow and save some palate time for Dolcetto, a traditional grape variety of the region currently out of favour with the marketplace. Dolcetto producers, led by the Pecchenino winery, are in the midst of trying to rebrand Dolcetto as Dogliani after the southerly part of the Langhe region, where Dolcetto has been grown since at least 1432. Dogliani wines are soft, easy drinkers bursting with red berry flavours (they're also markedly cheaper than Barolo or Barbaresco) and you'll be helping out the

WHERE TO STAY

CIABOT ROSSO

Strada San Bartolomeo, 4 – Cherasco

☎ +39 3282 233044

www.ciabotrosso.it

Ciabot Rosso is a charming B&B set on a hazelnut-covered hillside. Run by the genteel and always smiling Piero, the residences are idiosyncratic (including a treehouse), the breakfast tasty, and the views of the surrounding countryside are wonderful in the extreme. You'll fall asleep to the sound of crickets and awaken to cowbells – actually Piero's three sheep mowing his lawn.

CASA PECCHENINO

Borgata Valdiberti, 59 – Dogliani

☎ +39 0464 435222

www.casapecchenino.com

A winery-run B&B housed in a gorgeous, recently renovated farmhouse where the owners have paid careful attention to original features. Choose from a mini apartment or one of four double rooms, and enjoy the views of the surrounding Dolcetto-rich countryside from the peaceful panoramic terrace.

ALMATEA

Località Roccabertone, 81 – Mombarcaro

☎ +39 3332 824619

www.ipascolidiamaltea.it

An organic farm set in a beautiful, isolated nook in the Alta Langhe. Two double rooms are available, furnished using recycled materials and repurposed antiques. Breakfast involves homemade cakes baked with seasonal fruit, organic bread, and Arianna's nutty sheep's milk cheeses.





Images, clockwise from top left: the police are on hand to quell any cheese rage; hazelnuts, and lots of them; getting over excited in the hazel pit; chocolates at the Pasticceria Barbero; Ciabot Rosso B&B; panzerotti from Puglia (essentially fried pizza pockets)

dwindling number of producers fiercely loyal to a grape that's a part of their regional identity.

THE ALTA LANGHE

Also often overlooked by visitors to the region are the lush forested hills of the Alta Langhe. I took a drive up to Caranzano, "the village of the hazelnut", where you'll find a high density of farms (as well as extraordinary views over the Langhe's hilltop towns and surrounding mountains) supplying the world with Piedmont's famously delicious three-lobed hazelnuts.

I visit the family-run Nocciolo d'Elite, which owns 26 hectares of hazelnut groves. Giovanni runs through the entire hazelnut production process, from the tending of trees to the creation of hazelnut chocolate spread, at a breakneck clip. His energetic mimes, translated by my guide, make an industrial process genuinely quite a thrill. I'm encouraged to wade into a huge, dusty pool of hazelnuts, an experience which transports me back to the ball pools of my youth. Afterwards I'm cleaned off with a high pressure air hose and we watch while a steel tube pumps out viscous *crema di nocciole* into a vat. I almost have an Augustus Gloop moment.

After the hazelnut factory (which seems a much less anxiety-inducing way to get rich than the local wine work) we drive a little deeper into the Alta Langhe to an organic farm called Amaltea. Alessandro and Arianna who own the farm are part of a Slow Food initiative called a Presidium that helps to preserve and protect endangered production processes, animals or foodstuffs. In this case it's the couple's 67 Langhe sheep (farmed for milk and not meat) of which there are only 2,000 left in existence. Apparently the farm used to have a good round number of 70 sheep, but three were recently snaffled by wolves. The Alta Langhe is the real deal.

Arianna is also a cheesemaker, and she shows us her tiny cheese cellar where she experiments with various sheep's and cow's milk cheeses, including *toma* – a delicious semi-hard local variety that should



be on any visitor's shopping list. After the tour we try her cheeses with bread and unforgettable *cognà*, a sticky Piedmontese condiment made of any combination of autumn fruits – hazelnuts, figs, walnuts, pears, sugar... Every grandmother in Piedmont has her own recipe. The cheese and *cognà* are wonderful, especially when washed down with some light organic Barbera.

Perhaps it's the winding roads back down from the Alta Langhe to my B&B, or my delightful if chatty guide discussing the nuances of pasta-making at home, or the *cacio marcello* returned to haunt me – or a churning combination of all three – but that night my stomach descends to the seventh level of gastric hell and sleep does not come quick. If you're heading to Cheese, and the Langhe, it's difficult not to overdo it. Pack the Rennies now. ■

INFORMATION

- For further information go to www.cheese.slowfood.com and www.langheroero.it
- To book a hazelnut or cheese experience in the Alta Langhe go to www.tartufoevino.it

GETTING THERE

- **BY PLANE**
Direct flights to Turin with various carriers are available from Birmingham, Dublin, London Gatwick and Stansted, and Manchester. It's about an hour's drive south to Bra from Turin, or jump on Italy's splendidly cheap rail network at Torino Porta Susa station for a direct service that takes about the same time (cost of journey: £3.50). International Rail (www.internationalrail.com) makes booking a train ticket a breezy affair.



TUSCANY

PROPERTY FOCUS

With the natural beauty of the region it is easy to sell **property in Tuscany** in the summer, but go in winter if you really want to see what's worth the price...

WANDA DJEBBAR

TUSCANY PROPERTY SPECIALIST AT TOSCANARESTORATION.COM



So you love Tuscany and you are wondering whether you should dip your toe into its property market? Autumn/winter is an excellent time for serious buyers to look around. Agents will not all be on summer holiday (yes, it happens!) and if you love a property in this season, summer can only be a pleasant surprise (except in the case of a flat by the Ponte Vecchio). Even beginners will be able to notice if the roof has seen better days and whether gales rage inside as well as outside. This season

will also help you realise if that 'short private track' is only fit for access by a rally driver or a mountain goat.

Pick your area of Tuscany. The rugged north is steep, heavily wooded and affordable. Arezzo and its province is the gem of eastern Tuscany. The Chianti can, depending on the property, have higher prices, but is popular for a good reason: it is very attractive! Siena and the Val d'Orcia in central/southern Tuscany is picture-postcard Tuscany – olive groves, vineyards, woods and cypresses encircling medieval hill towns. Prices are nowhere near as high as the beauty of the surroundings would suggest. Buy for enjoyment and price stability not 'buy to let' – although summer lettings may make a modest contribution...



€500,000-€750,000

MONTALCINO

Unique two-floor apartment in the heart of Montalcino, Siena. Set in the renowned wine hill town of Montalcino, the centre of the prestigious Brunello wine denomination, this property is undergoing careful restoration. The reception room of the apartment features magnificent arched loggia windows for a spectacular panorama of the Val d'Orcia and the notable buildings of Montalcino. These are also the view from the top floor covered 'eat on' terrace. The property further comprises a luminous kitchen, 3 ensuite bedrooms and dressing and study areas.

Offers in the region of €520,000 Contact ☎ +39 338 793 5130
info@toscanarestoration.com



€250,000-€500,000

MONTALCINO

A well-proportioned and restored townhouse in a quiet yet central position in Montalcino, Siena. The property is on three floors offering a kitchen/ dining room, utility room, a double aspect sitting room, three bedrooms and three bathrooms. Restoration of the house was carried out to the highest standards and materials used are all natural and handmade such as chestnut beams, handmade local floor bricks and travertine stone as work surfaces and tiling. Montalcino is a hill town world famous for its wine and the property will appeal to those who appreciate fine wine and the quality of life in this beautiful part of Tuscany!

Price **€395,000** Contact ☎ **+39 338 793 5130**
info@toscanarestoration.com



€500,000-€750,000

CASTELFALFI

Beautiful 5 bedroom farmhouse divided into two apartments, with its own swimming pool, 1km from the centre of Castelfalfi and the famous golf course, less than 1hr from Pisa airport and about 1hr from Florence. The property, which has been completely renovated, provides about 210sqm of accommodation over two floors and consists of two apartments. Behind the house, there is a large terrace with steps down to the swimming pool. The property is surrounded by about 0.5 hectare of garden with view. To complete the property, there is a large barn which has been renovated to provide a covered outdoor area and storage facility. Ref 3726.

Price **€530,000** Contact ☎ **01322 660 988** www.casatravella.com



€100,000-€250,000

MONTALCINO

A attractive independent apartment in the scenic area of Montalcino, south of Siena. The property is situated on the top floor of an old stone building in the centre of a thriving large village with good shopping, services and transport. Accommodation comprises; entrance from a private patio, ground floor utility room, feature staircase to upper level with sitting room open plan to kitchen area, bathroom and two bedrooms with access to their own small roof terrace, but with room for eating out on. There is also a cellar/ workshop under the building. This perfect bolt hole is in excellent well restored condition. Just add furniture!

Price **€155,000** Contact ☎ **+39 338 793 5130**
info@toscanarestoration.com



€100,000-€250,000

MOLAZZANA

This lovely 4 bedroom traditional rustic style property in a panoramic quiet and isolated position close to Molazzana with superb views over the hills, about 10km from Castelnuovo Garfagnana, 55 minutes from Lucca, 1hr from the Versilia coast, 75 minutes from Pisa airport and 90 minutes from Florence. The property comprises the main house as well as a separate renovated barn for guest accommodation. Externally the property sits inside a fenced garden, has a covered terrace for dining and relaxation, and a wood burning pizza oven, and benefits from central heating by gas or wood pellet, and there is also a further 8 hectares (almost 20 acres) of land. Energy Classification – "G" Ref 3760.

Price **€245,000** Contact ☎ **01322 660 988** www.casatravella.com



€250,000-€500,000

MONTAIONE

This two storey 3 bedroom apartment forms part of a completely renovated complex of 12 units, just a few steps from the Castelfalfi golf course close to Montaione, in the countryside between Pisa and Florence, some 40 minutes from Pisa airport and about 1 hour from the Tyrrhenian coast, Lucca and San Gimignano. The property benefits from gas central heating, a private garden of about 220sqm with lovely views over the communal swimming pool and magnificent 360 degree panoramic views over the Tuscan countryside and the Castelfalfi golf course. An ideal opportunity to purchase a spacious property in the lovely unspoiled countryside whilst having easy access to both the Castelfalfi Golf course and all amenities. Energy Classification – 11. Ref 3655 Price €279,000 Contact ☎ 01322 660 988 www.casatravella.com



€750,000-€1000,000

ABBADIA SAN SALVATORE, SIENA

In the heart of Tuscany, beautifully renovated, 3 bedroom apartment in a small, ancient hamlet with parking, a shared pool, lovely grounds, surrounded by beautiful, unspoiled countryside. The hamlet has a rich and interesting history and can be traced back to the eleventh century. Originally a watch tower built in 1048, the building became the property of the church and was transformed into a Bishops' residence and a medieval farming hamlet, later still the house and its grounds were used as a country retreat for many of the noble families of the region. This charming apartment is on the first floor of the main building and was once the Bishops palatial rooms. Price €850,000 Contact ☎ 07 791 033 601 homesitalia@yahoo.co.uk www.homesitalia.co.uk



€500,000-€750,000

SANTA LUCE

Wonderful opportunity to own a stone-built farmhouse in a corner of authentic Tuscany. The property sits on a hill overlooking oak forests and a valley that slopes down to the lake of Santa Luce. It is 1km from the medieval town of Santa Luce and 20km from the coastal town of Castiglioncello. Pisa airport is only 37km away. The house (approx. 200sqm) sits in gardens of about 15,000sqm with a large swimming pool and a pergola. The ground floor has 3 bedrooms each with en-suite bathroom and doors leading out on to the garden. The first floor is made up of a living room with fireplace, large kitchen, bedroom and bathroom and the tower houses a further bedroom. Price €620,000 Contact ☎ 07 791 033 601 homesitalia@yahoo.co.uk www.homesitalia.co.uk



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The Painted Room

Damaged by the earthquakes of 2012, the Ducal Palace of Mantua houses an extraordinary work of *trompe l'oeil* art. **Joe Gartman** recalls an earlier visit to the *Camera Picta*, or Painted Room...



Andrea Mantegna's 'Wedding Chamber',
also known as the 'Painted Room'

As I look out toward a lovely Renaissance city perched among the distant hills, I notice that the Marchese has deserted his post and is now outside greeting his son who has just returned from Rome



Photograph © Pat Garman

View from the River Mincio of the Castello San Giorgio, part of the Ducal Palace complex and home of the Camera Picta



We find the Marchese in consultation with his secretary, Marsilio

Photography courtesy of Soprintendenza per i Beni Storici Artistici ed Etnoantropologici per le Province di Mantova, Brescia e Cremona, unless otherwise stated

January 2010

The Marchese is not paying any attention to us. We don't take offense, of course. He's a busy man. In fact, he's deep in conversation with his secretary, Marsilio, while a file of young men in their Sunday best waits to speak with him. His wife, Barbara, a formidable lady with a snow-white veil drawn over her hair, sits patiently beside him while he conducts business.



We're in a pavilion of the Ducal Palace in Mantua. It's an extraordinary space, open on one side to the surrounding countryside, and there is a circular opening, or oculus, in the domed ceiling through which we can see the sky and clouds. Surprisingly, it seems that a number of servants and other folk have climbed onto the roof and are peering down into the room. They're a jolly group – a few naked children cling precariously to the rim of the oculus, while some of the smiling women seem intent on tipping a large potted plant down onto our heads.



View across the Ducal Palace complex



A jolly group looks over the rim of the oculus



As I look out toward a lovely Renaissance city perched among the distant hills, I notice that the Marchese has deserted his post and is now outside with a couple of the younger children, greeting his son Francesco who has just returned from Rome.

We might as well be visitors from another time for all the notice anyone takes of us. Well, actually, there are a couple of people staring at us, although I hadn't realized it before. A diminutive elderly woman, no more than three feet tall,

is looking at us with undisguised contempt from among the courtiers waiting for the Marchese. And there is a man pacing the corridor outside the pavilion, alternately looking meaningfully at his watch and then at us. I know what *that* means. We've overstayed our time. He's too polite to actually throw us out, especially as it's the middle of winter and there are no other visitors. But we take one more, long gaze around before leaving the pavilion. Darned if it *looks* like winter outside – balmy

sunshine glows on the surrounding hills. It all seems rather dreamlike, fantastic, real and yet unreal.

And, in fact, it *is* a fantasy. But not ours. The only 21st-century participants in this scene are my wife, Pat, and myself, and the impatient guard with his ticking wristwatch. And the apparent pavilion with its family gathering and view of the outdoors is also an artful contrivance. In fact, we are in a smallish room surrounded on all sides by substantial stone walls, part of the formidable



The Camera Picta has a series of full compositions in fresco

A diminutive elderly woman, no more than three feet tall, is looking at us with undisguised contempt from among the courtiers waiting for the Marchese

palace/fortress of the Gonzaga family, who ruled Mantua for nearly 400 years. The Marchese and his wife, his courtiers, the countryside, the little scowling dwarf, the hole in the roof and the playful peasants above us, all are painted wraiths. This startlingly real but fantastical scene was created more than five hundred years ago by one of the most skilful and important artists of the Italian Renaissance, Andrea Mantegna.

It's called the *Camera Picta*, (the Painted Room), or alternatively the *Camera degli Sposi*, (the Wedding Chamber) since it supposedly celebrated the marriage of Ludovico Gonzaga, Marchese of Mantua, and his wife, Barbara of Brandenburg. The Camera Picta is in one of the four square towers of Castello San

Giorgio, a sternly fortified part of the Palazzo Ducale complex. Ludovico commissioned the decoration of the room in 1465. For the job, Mantegna resurrected and perfected the *quadratura* technique of Ancient Roman artists – a difficult type of *trompe l'oeil* painting. By 1474, he had created the most influential illusionistic scene of his time, not equalled until Antonio da Correggio's soaring ceilings in the next century.

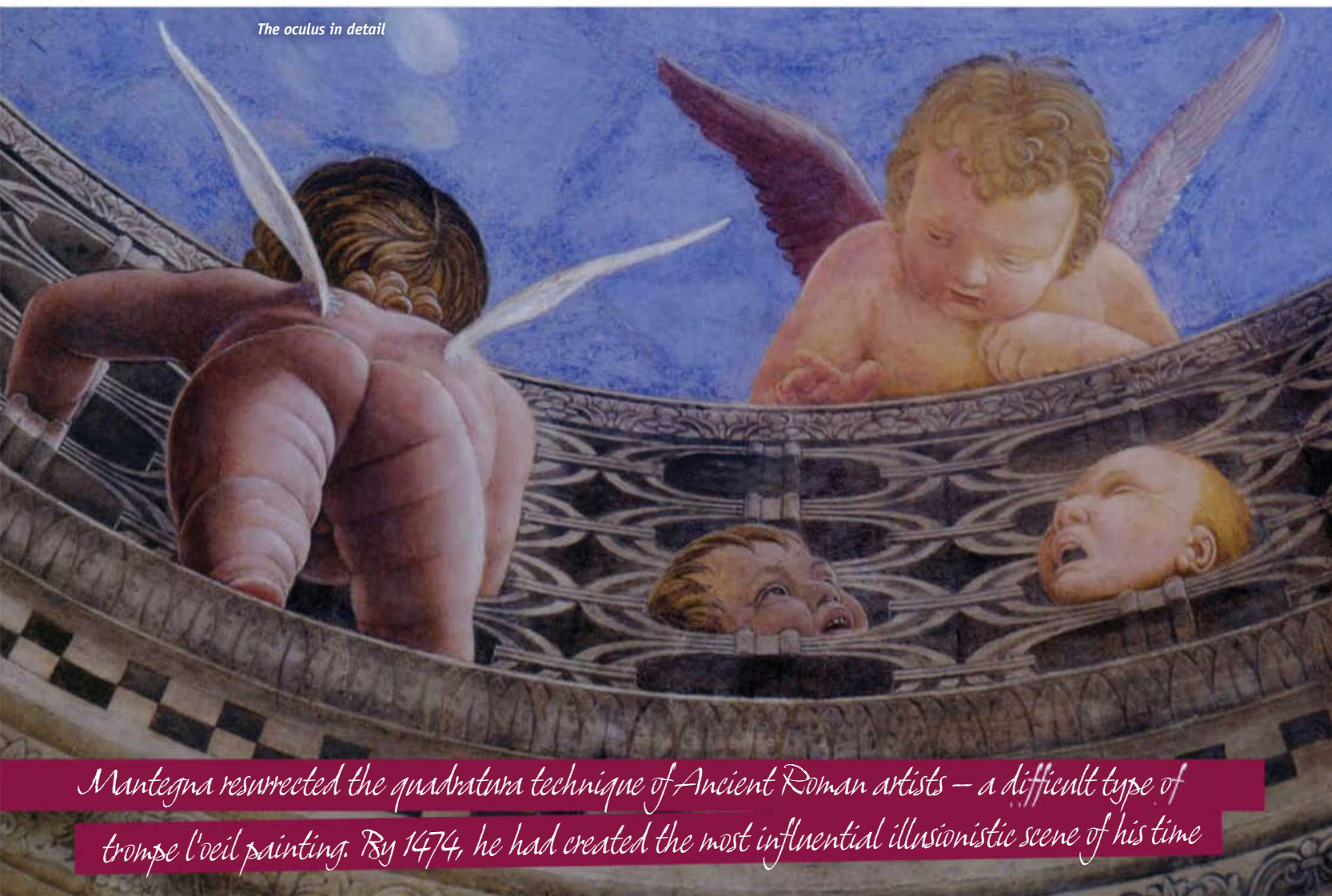
Mantegna was court painter to the Gonzagas of Mantua for 49 years, from 1460 until his death in 1509. Among his patrons there was Isabella d'Este, Marchesa of Mantua and wife of Francesco II Gonzaga. She recognized Mantegna's genius, and gave him important commissions for her famous *Studiolo*, though she

was a demanding client and their relationship was sometimes stormy. Mantegna liked to live well, and had expensive tastes; like Isabella, he was a collector of art and antiquities, with which he decorated the house that he built for himself in Mantua.

He used a unique "circle in a square" design, the circle forming an interior courtyard. He began construction in 1476 but took 20 years to finish the project – Andrea was a busy man, much in demand, and couldn't spare much time to his own home.

By all accounts he was a rather prickly fellow, and who can blame him? He built the house on land given him by Ludovico Gonzaga in payment for his artistic service, but financial pressure made him sell it to

The oculus in detail



Mantegna resurrected the quadratura technique of Ancient Roman artists – a difficult type of trompe l'oeil painting. By 1474, he had created the most influential illusionistic scene of his time

Andrea Mantegna's house in Mantua



Photograph © Pat Gartman

Francesco Gonzaga in 1502. There's a famous bronze bust of Mantegna in the church of Sant'Andrea that shows the artist looking as if he's just received the foreclosure notice.

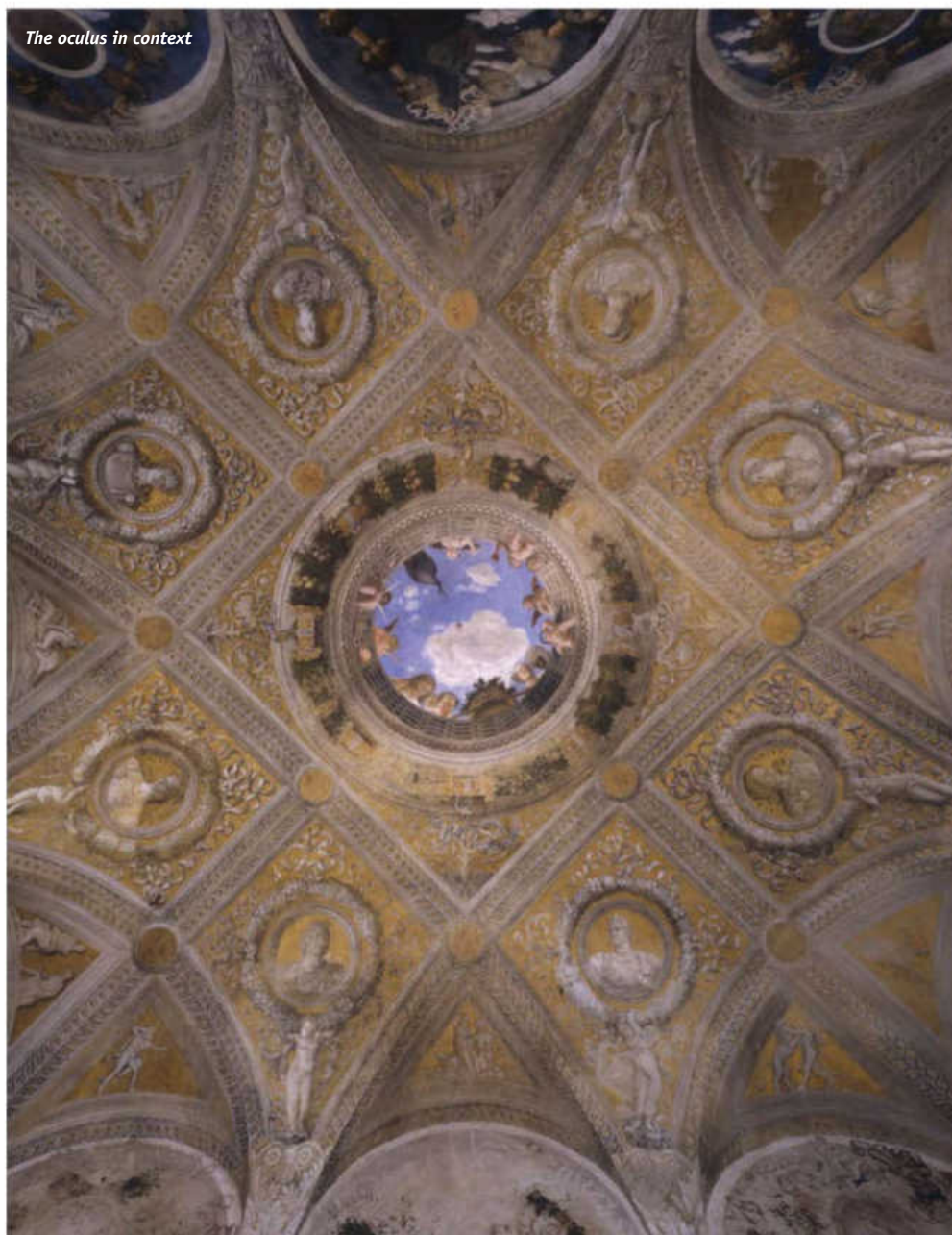
He created many magnificent works. One of the most famous, the *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, showing Christ's body in extreme and disturbing foreshortening, is now in the Brera Museum in Milan. It was found in his house after his death, where he evidently kept it for more than 30 years. But the Painted Room is his masterpiece, an astonishing *tour de force* that has influenced artists ever since.

September 2015

I wrote the little fantasy above to express my amazement at Mantegna's achievement, a couple of years before the Painted Room and the Ducal Palace in Mantua were severely damaged by the violent earthquakes of May 2012. After the earthquakes, the Painted Room was closed for almost three years. Soon after the closure, I contacted the Ministry of Culture for information. The Superintendent for the Province of Mantua at the time, dott.ssa Giovanna Paolozzi Strozzi, very kindly sent me an overview of the damage and the daunting work that would be required to re-open the site. I despaired of ever seeing the Marchese and Marchesa and their grumpy little friend again. However, the site did re-open last April, with a limit of 1,500 visitors per day.

You can find more information at the official website of the Palazzo Ducale, Mantova (www.mantovaducale.beniculturali.it). When you go, no doubt the chap with the ticking wristwatch will have his eye on you. Still, even if it's a short visit, it's one you won't forget. ■

The oculus in context



INFORMATION

► The ticket office for the Palazzo Ducale is at Piazza Sordello, 40 – Mantua. Opening hours are 8:15am to 7:15pm. Closed Mondays.

► Be sure to choose the Castello di San Giorgio itinerary for your visit if you want to see the Painted Room.

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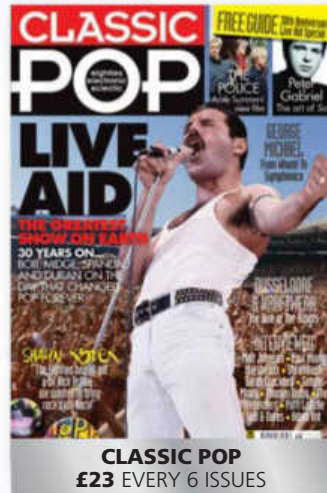
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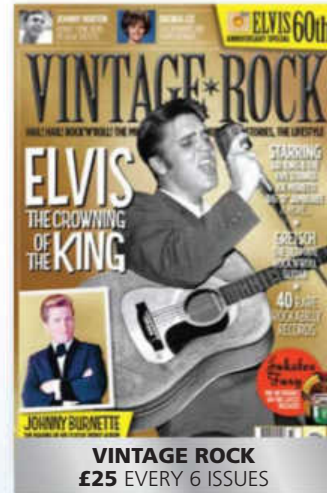
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STRUFFOLI

A Christmas treat that's as old as Christmas itself (indeed, probably rather older) *struffoli* are an essential part of the seasonal festivities in Naples – and also surprisingly easy to make for yourself at home...

Deep-fried dough balls dipped in honey and decorated with hundreds and thousands (aka, 'nonpareils' to our North American readers), dragées (*confetti* in Italian) and candied citrus fruit, *struffoli* are a traditional Christmas treat typical of Naples. No one knows where the name comes from, but it's old. It may derive from Greek – it is thought the recipe arrived in Naples from Greece in the days of Partenope... So how do you make them then? Easy. You make a large ball of dough from 400g of plain flour, 40g of white sugar, 3 medium eggs plus one yolk, 60g of melted but

cold butter or lard (use lard), some orange and or lemon zest, and a dash of anise liqueur. You leave this to rest under a tea towel, at room temperature, for at least half an hour, then you cut it into manageable chunks. You roll these chunks into long, thin lines and you cut the lines into small pieces. Then you deep fry the pieces, drain them and dip them in warm, clear honey. (You probably buy in the hundreds and thousands, dragées and candied fruit.) To present, you place a wine glass upside down on a plate and you fill the plate with *struffoli*. Then you remove the glass, so there's a clear space in the middle of the plate. Ta-da! It's Christmas! ■

THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS



DAVE ROGERS is Manager at the Camisa Online Store and Fratelli Camisa Wholesale. He is married to an Anglo-Italian and began work at Fratelli Camisa 22 years ago. He has

become immersed in all things Italian, from food and wine to holidays, even cars... He says it now seems to be in his blood!



LAURA PROTTI is dual qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor. She has extensive experience in Italian property law, international private law, contract law, succession law, and

taxation, and has assisted with the drafting and updating of books and articles on Italian Law. www.leplaw.co.uk



MAXIMILLIAN SMITH is Marketing Manager at De'Longhi UK and has a wealth of knowledge about coffee. De'Longhi make some of the best coffee machines on the market today – to see

the full range of options for home coffee machines see their website at www.seriousaboutcoffee.com

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Our experts are here to help with all your questions about Italy. Email your questions to italia@anthem-publishing.com, or write to us at our usual address, as given on page 18.



There is nothing like fresh pesto, but there is quite an art to making it

PESTO LIKE HOMEMADE

Q *I enjoy making my own pesto, but often just don't have the time. Can you recommend a jarred pesto that would taste every bit as good as my homemade variety? I use a mix of fresh basil, pine nuts, garlic (though not too much of it as I find it can overpower the other flavours of the other ingredients), parmesan, high-quality olive oil and fresh salt and pepper. I occasionally add a little double cream to 'free up' the texture. Is that something the Italians would do? I stumbled across the idea simply because I had some cream in the fridge to use up!*

Janet Singleton, via email

A Making your own pesto is a great idea as it is really simple and can taste way better than anything you can buy, but getting the ingredients right is essential.

To make the best Ligurian pesto (which is the most famous one) you need to use the freshest basil you can find (or preferably grow it yourself), pine nuts, fresh parmesan, fresh pecorino romano (a strong sheep's milk cheese), good extra virgin olive oil and just

a dash of salt. And that's really it – you can add some cashew nuts for extra texture if you have them but it's not essential. And do be really careful with the garlic because, as you say, it can really overpower the whole thing if you add too much.

We have never heard of using cream, and it could work to soften the flavour of the basil if you didn't want it too strong – Italians would never do this though. The traditional way of serving pesto is to stir it through some just al dente *trofie* pasta, (the shape that looks like a tiny twisted baguette) and grate a bit more parmesan over the top – delicious!

Here at Camisa we import and sell a fantastic range of pesto and tapenades from the company Minasso, who are one of the original growers and producers of Italian basil pesto, having first started the company way back in 1962. Situated in Caravonica in the heart of the Genova countryside they produce some of the best pesto in Italy.

Dave Rogers, Manager at the Camisa Online Store and Fratelli Camisa Wholesale
www.camisa.co.uk/buy-pesto-sauce-online/buy-pesto-online

GIFTING PROPERTY

Q My husband has inherited a small house in Umbria from his mother, though he is disabled and too frail to travel. We'd like to pass it on down to our children (both in their 20s), but wondered if there are any legal or tax implications in doing so given that my husband is still alive. Our children both live and work in the UK and would consider renting the house out during the summer season so they draw an income from it.

Katrina Shaw, via email

A Before gifting his property to his children your husband should consider the legal and tax implications of the gift both in the UK and in Italy.

If your husband gifts the property to his children, he will be responsible for tax on any income generated by the property up until the date of the gift. He will also be responsible for paying any UK Capital Gains tax due on the property.

Capital Gains tax may be payable even he gifts the property without receiving anything in return.

His children, on the other hand, will be responsible for paying the tax on any taxable income generated by the property.

In addition to this, it should be noted that gifts made less than seven years before the donor's death count towards the UK Inheritance Tax threshold.

The children would be required to pay a 4 per cent gift tax in Italy on anything above the €1,000,000 (one million euro) threshold. The tax is calculated on the cadastral value of the property, which is normally considerably lower than its actual market value. At the time of transfer the beneficiaries are also liable to pay an additional 3 per cent tax, again calculated on the "official" cadastral value.

This double liability is mitigated by the double taxation treaty between Italy and the UK.

The future legal implications of the gift in Italy should also be considered. It is advisable to seek independent professional advice from a dual qualified lawyer (Italian *Avvocato*/English Solicitor) before making any final decision on this transfer.

Laura Protti, LEP Law



Gifts property presents legal and tax complications

Laura Protti is the founder of LEP Law. She is dual-qualified as an Italian *avvocato* and English solicitor, and specialises in assisting British and Italian clients with matters relating to Italian law. Visit her website at www.leplaw.co.uk for more.



Coffee Corner

USING MINERAL WATER

Q I am worried about how hard our water is in the area I live in (we're amongst chalk hills). Instead of using tap water to make coffee in our bean-to-cup machine could I use bottled mineral water? Would there be an effect on the taste of the coffee? And would it mean that I wouldn't have to use a water filter in the machine itself or descale it as often?

Simon Devonshire, via email

A Water does impart a flavour (both taste and more notably smell) on coffee. For many people it may not make any difference, for others it may. Treated water can sometimes have a noticeable chlorine smell. Water hardness will also affect the *crema* (hazelnut micro-foam) you get on the top of an espresso.

Bottled mineral waters also have different levels of minerals. Some can be noticeably metallic. Likewise they will have some calcium in them, which means your coffee machine will still need descaling. However, descaling can be done less frequently if the calcium level is low. For this same reason keeping a water softening filter in the machine will further reduce the calcium levels in the water, but if calcium levels are low it may not be as worthwhile.

To find out how hard water is in your area download the free De'Longhi "Coffee Expert" app and search "Machine Maintenance".

Maximillian Smith, Trade Marketing Manager

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Building the Dream

It is just under a year since **Jane Smith** and her husband Richard began to restore their dream home. Amazingly, the house is now finished – just in time for Christmas...



Jane Smith runs an estate agency in Le Marche: www.magicmarche.com. You can contact Jane at: jane@magicmarche.com. Her husband, Richard, runs a restoration management company: www.smithpropertyconsultancy.com. You can contact Richard at: richard@smithprops.com

For 11 months we had rented a small house in the middle of a vineyard from a local family and on the 10th of November, the day we finally moved out, they gave us some beautiful flowers and local wines to help us celebrate our first Christmas in our new home.

To return to this new house in under a year was an amazing feat and a testament to the team of builders, artisans and professionals who had helped us achieve it. I would miss working with them.

Our daughters arrived from the UK the week before Christmas and helped us with the festive decorations. The prosecco was chilled and the turkey bought. It was a special time of relaxation together, beach walks with the dog and plenty of good Italian food and wine.

We hoped that Bruno (now deceased), the old farmer from whom we had bought the house, would be proud of what we had done. We believe we kept alive the spirit and feel of his old house; certainly the incorporation of many of the old beams, lintels and floor tiles had helped us to retain some essence of Bruno's old home. I hope you can also see this in these before and after photos and that maybe my rebuild journey has inspired you to 'Build your Dream'. ■



Bruno's memory lives on in the new house



Tiramisù macaroons

Here is a coffee-infused twist on an old favourite, the 'pick me up' tiramisù. This recipe will make 20-25 macaroons.

FOR THE MERINGUE

175g caster sugar
1 tsp coffee essence
75ml water
65g egg whites

FOR THE ALMOND PASTE

175g ground almonds
175g icing Sugar
65g egg whites

FOR THE MASCARPONE CHEESE FILLING

50g full fat mascarpone
60ml double cream
½ tbsp amaretto
½ tbsp Marsala

1 tbsp strong espresso,
cooled

TO DECORATE

amaretti biscuits, crushed

Preheat the oven to 135°C/Gas Mark 2 and line two baking sheets with parchment.

To make the meringue add the sugar, coffee essence and water to a small saucepan and stir. Place a sugar thermometer in the pan and put over a high heat.

Once the sugar syrup reaches 110°C, whisk the egg whites into a froth. When the syrup reaches 114°C quickly pour the syrup into the egg whites and mix on high setting for 5 minutes until meringue is glossy and holds its shape.

For the almond paste, combine the ground almonds and icing sugar in a bowl. Add the egg whites and mix with a wooden spoon to a stiff paste.

Add one third of the meringue to the almond paste and mix well with a wooden spoon. With a spatula, gently fold another third of the meringue into the paste before gently adding the remaining meringue.

Fill piping bags with the mixture and snip a 1-2cm hole from the end. Holding the bag directly above the tray, pipe macaroons 4cm in diameter, leaving a 2cm gap between each. Bake for 12 minutes. If the macaroons are very sticky when they come out return them to the oven for 2 more minutes. Allow to cool on the trays.

For the mascarpone cheese filling, whisk together the mascarpone cheese and double cream. Once the mixture is thick, whisk in the amaretto, Marsala and coffee. Transfer the cream mixture into a piping bag and set aside.

To assemble the macaroons, arrange the macaroon shells in columns, matching the sizes of the shells. Pipe the mascarpone cheese filling into the centre of the shells and sandwich together.

Cool passion

This creamy, non-alcoholic treat makes for a delightful sign-off to any dinner party.

INGREDIENTS

Double espresso

1 to 1 sugar-water
ratio (bring to a boil
and then let cool)

Hazelnut cracknell

20ml of fresh
maracuja (passion
fruit) juice or syrup

50ml of cold cream

Crushed ice
2 tsp of honey

Start by dipping the rim of the glass into the sugar water and then into the hazelnuts. Place the espresso, maracuja juice and crushed ice together in a shaker. Leave to stand briefly and then pour the contents into the glass. Place honey, cream and crushed ice in a separate shaker. Shake briefly and then pour slowly into the glass.



CHRISTMAS COFFEE TREATS

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Using only fresh beans and fresh milk, these compact coffee machines serve your coffee shop favourites, from a frothy cappuccino to a smooth flat white, to a crema-rich espresso – and all at the touch of a button. What's more, De'Longhi brings you the ultimate bean-to-cup technology with auto cleaning and rinse functions.



De'Longhi Dedica

£199

Tradition meets modernity on this stunning machine, which combines Italian design, versatility and high performance in one small but perfectly formed package. At just 15cm wide, it boasts all the features of a traditional Italian coffee machine, without taking up valuable worktop space. Three easy to use buttons deliver a precision single or double shot of coffee, while the manual frother builds hot frothy milk effortlessly.

These compact coffee machines serve your coffee shop favourites, from a frothy cappuccino to a smooth flat white, to a crema-rich espresso – and all at the touch of a button.

White truffles in Le Marche

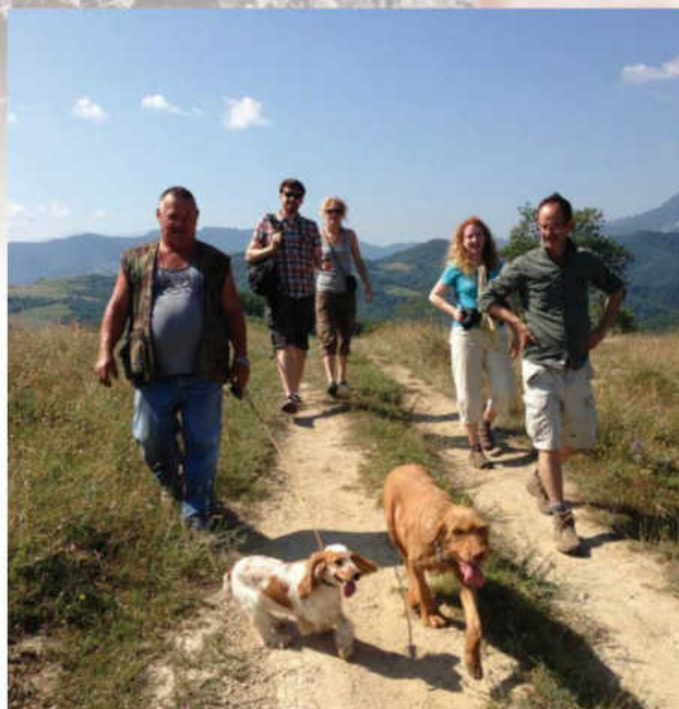


November is prime truffle time and truffles represent the greatest culinary treasure of the gastronomic area of Le Marche. Moreno Moretti organises with his company, **Le Marche Holiday**, specific gastronomic tours in order to know all the secrets of this edible treasure...

For those who like the adventure, it is possible to take part in a special truffle hunting (that lasts about two hours) with a professional truffle hunter who finds these underground fungi with the help of his highly trained sniffer dogs.

You will get your shoes dirty following the dog and his master through the woods early in the morning and, if you are lucky enough, you will see the dog will be furiously digging and the truffle hunter will extract the truffle carefully with a special tool. He then proceeds to cover the hole in order to not damage the natural spores and to scrape back the earth from the truffle.

After that you are invited into the kitchen and, with the help of a trained chef, you can cook or simply taste the real traditional truffle dishes of this undiscovered region.



TEN THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

1 Most truffles rarely grow in the same spot twice and are embedded under the soil, close to roots of holm oaks, chestnut trees, poplars, pines or hazelnut trees.

2 Truffles can be stored for several days in a paper bag in the refrigerator, but the strength of their flavour decreases rapidly with time.

3 Since the times of the Romans, truffles have been used in Europe as delicacies, medicines, and even aphrodisiacs.

4 Traditionally, pigs were used to hunt truffles but in Italy their use has been prohibited because of damage caused to the soil, and dogs have replaced them as they are easier to control and train. Today, the Lagotto Romagnolo is the official breed for truffle hunting in Italy.

5 Most truffle hunters are serious about keeping their truffle finds and locations secret.

6 Truffles must be collected at the proper time otherwise they will have little taste. You can buy fresh white truffles in Le Marche between October and the end of December.

7 Truffle hunting can be arranged seasonally for white truffles from September to December.

8 During the last weekends of October, Sant'Angelo in Vado in Le Marche hosts the *Mostra Nazionale del Tartufo Bianco Pregiato*, an excellent chance to taste white truffles and see the town at its best.

9 From the end of October through the first two weekends in November, Acqualagna in Le Marche is transformed into Italy's "truffle capital" as it hosts its annual Truffle Fair.

10 White truffles are perfect to enrich main courses and may be inserted into meats, under the skins of roasted fowl, in foie gras, pâtés, or stuffings, but they are generally served raw for adding flavour to omelettes, rice or fresh homemade pasta as they exalt the fragrance of these dishes. **11**

CONTACT DETAILS

► LE MARCHE HOLIDAY

For more information about truffle tours, please contact Moreno Moretti at info@lemarcheholiday.net



Tagliatelle with white truffle

Have you ever tasted fresh truffles grated onto fresh egg pasta? Try our recipe of this delicious main course!

INGREDIENTS FOR 4 SERVINGS

350/400g fresh egg pasta, like tagliatelle (or tagliolini)

2 tbsp butter

some slices of white truffle

salt and white pepper

freshly grated parmesan cheese

Boil the pasta in lots of boiling salted water until al dente. In the meantime heat the butter with a pinch of pepper in a large skillet until melted.

Drain the pasta and add to the butter with a glass of cooking water. Place on the plate, add white truffle and cheese



at your pleasure and serve immediately. *Buon appetito* – you will discover one of the most instantly addictive flavours on the planet!

4 takes on CHRISTMAS ROASTS

You are just as likely to find **roast meat** at Christmas in Italy as you are in Britain, even if regional variations in customs may dictate when or how it is prepared and served...





Leg of lamb with garlic and rosemary

Cosciotto d'agnello con aglio e rosmarino

Browning the meat before roasting in a hot oven will ensure a golden brown crust and delicate pink flesh.

SERVES 4

- **Preparation**
15 minutes
- **Roasting**
40 minutes

INGREDIENTS

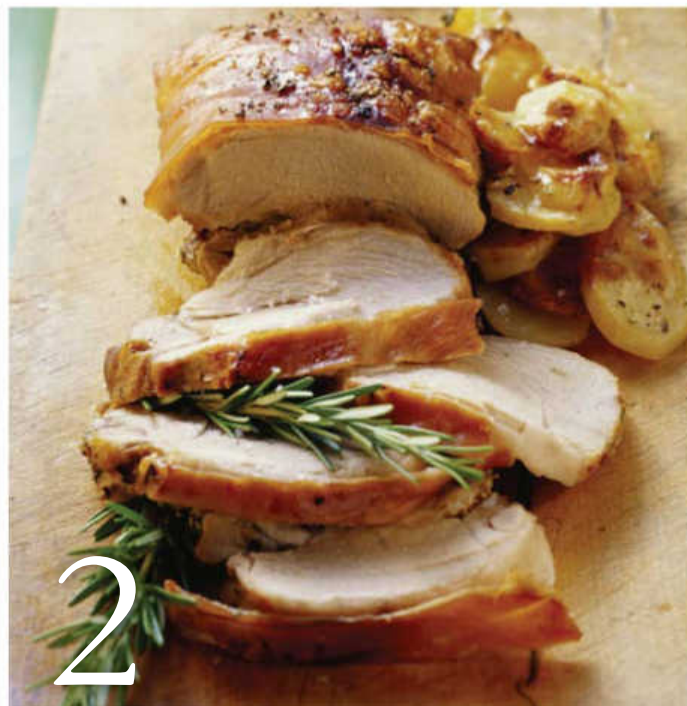
1 leg of lamb (about 1.2kg)
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 garlic cloves, peeled, sliced lengthways
½ bunch rosemary, broken into small tufts
4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
2 tbsp Dijon mustard
2 tbsp clear honey

Preheat the oven to 200°C/Gas Mark 6. Rub the leg of lamb with salt and pepper; then, using a sharp knife, make incisions about 2cm deep all over the lamb. Push a piece of garlic or a tuft of rosemary into each incision.

Heat the olive oil in a frying pan and quickly brown the meat on all sides. Transfer the meat to a roasting tin, add a cup of water and roast in the oven for about 40 minutes.

Mix the mustard and honey together in a small bowl and, halfway through the cooking time, turn the leg of lamb over and brush with the mustard and honey mixture.

Serve the lamb on a warmed platter garnished with sprigs of fresh rosemary.



Leg of pork with rosemary and fennel

Cosciotto di maiale con rosmarino e finocchio

Pork will benefit from a long roasting time, especially when cooked with herbs as strong as these.

SERVES 4

- **Preparation**
25 minutes
- **Roasting**
2 hours

INGREDIENTS

½ tsp fennel seeds
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 tbsp chopped rosemary needles
4 garlic cloves, peeled, finely chopped
5 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 boned leg of young suckling pig (about 1.5kg)
500ml red wine

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Mix the fennel seeds, salt, pepper, rosemary, garlic and 1 tbsp olive oil together in a bowl. Rub the leg of pork with this mixture, then tie the pork up with string.

Heat the rest of the olive oil in a large frying pan, add the meat and brown on all sides. Transfer to a roasting tin and place in the oven for about 2 hours, basting the meat frequently with the roasting juices. After 1 hour of roasting pour the red wine over the meat.

To serve remove the string, then slice the meat and arrange on a warmed serving platter. Pour the roasting juices over the meat and garnish with sprigs of fresh rosemary. Serve with thin roast potatoes.



Wild boar with chestnuts

Cinghiale con castagne

Wild boar is traditionally hunted in the autumn, just as the chestnut is coming into season. Boar meat benefits from a very long and slow roast.

SERVES 4

➤ **Preparation**
45 minutes, plus
2 days marinating

➤ **Roasting**
1 hour 30
minutes

INGREDIENTS

1kg wild boar haunch, loin or saddle, boned and rolled
2 onions, peeled, cut into chunks
2 carrots, peeled, diced
¼ celeriac bulb, peeled, diced
5 bay leaves
500ml red wine
3 tbsp white-wine vinegar
5 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
300g chestnuts, shells removed
4 garlic cloves, peeled, cut in half
3 sprigs of rosemary, needles only
5 tbsp olive oil

Place the meat in a deep dish with the onions, carrots, celeriac and bay. Pour the red wine and white-wine vinegar over the top, then cover and put in the fridge for two days, turning the meat occasionally.

Preheat the oven to 150°C/Gas Mark 2. Take the meat out of the marinade, heat some olive oil in a frying pan and brown the meat. Transfer the meat to a roasting tin and strain the marinade through a sieve. Pour 150ml of marinade over the meat and add the chestnuts, garlic and rosemary. Cook the meat in the oven for 1½ hours, basting with the rest of the marinade from time to time.

Remove the meat from the oven, cover with foil and rest for 10 minutes. Slice the meat thinly, then serve with the chestnuts, sauce and roast potatoes.



Chicken with sage

Pollo alla salvia

To feed more people, look out for a capon. This bird is slightly larger than a chicken, but not as big as a turkey.

SERVES 4

➤ **Preparation**
15 minutes
plus 1 hour
marinating

➤ **Roasting**
1 hour 30
minutes

INGREDIENTS

1 large chicken
20ml white-wine vinegar
the juice of ½ a lemon
2 tsp honey
10 sage leaves, finely chopped
4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 onions, peeled, roughly chopped
3 garlic cloves, peeled
400ml chicken stock
250ml red wine
sage leaves, to garnish

Dab the chicken with vinegar. Put the lemon juice, honey, sage and olive oil into a bowl, mix together well and season to taste. Pour the sage marinade over the chicken, cover and place in the fridge for about 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 175°C/Gas Mark 3. Remove the chicken from the marinade and place in a roasting dish along with the onions and garlic. Spoon a little chicken stock over the chicken, then cook in the oven for about 1 hour 30 minutes, basting with chicken stock and red wine from time to time to retain the moisture.

Risotto

Four delicious recipes for Italy's classic rice dish from *Risotto*, the latest book by food writer and cooking teacher **Maxine Clark**...



Butternut squash, sage and chilli risotto

Risotto alla zucca violina, salvia e peperoncino

► **SERVES 6** ► **PREPARATION** 10 minutes ► **COOKING** 40 minutes

I live in Scotland and was tempted to make a traditional pumpkin risotto using what we call 'turnip' instead. I was impressed with the result. It was less sweet and cloying than it would be using pumpkin or squash, but had a very distinct flavour. I have served this on Burns' Night with haggis, and it is delicious – but stick to the traditional recipe and it will be just as good. This tastes wonderful on its own or served with grilled meats.

INGREDIENTS

1.5 litres hot vegetable or chicken stock

125g unsalted butter

1 large onion, finely chopped

1-2 fresh or dried red chillies, deseeded and finely chopped

500g fresh butternut squash or pumpkin, peeled and finely diced

500g risotto rice

3 tbsp fresh sage, chopped

75g freshly grated parmesan

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Pour the stock into a saucepan and keep at a gentle simmer. Melt half the butter in a large, heavy saucepan and add the onion. Cook gently for 10 minutes until soft, golden and translucent but not browned.

Stir in the chopped chillies and cook for 1 minute. Add the butternut or pumpkin and cook, stirring constantly, over the heat for 5 minutes, until it begins to soften slightly.

Stir in the rice to coat with the butter and

vegetables. Cook for a few minutes to toast the grains.

Begin adding the stock, a large ladleful at a time, stirring gently until each ladle has almost been absorbed by the rice. The risotto should be kept at a bare simmer throughout cooking, so don't let the rice dry out – add more stock as necessary.

Continue until the rice is tender and creamy but the grains are still firm, and the squash is beginning to disintegrate. (This should take 15–20 minutes depending on the type of rice used.)

Taste and season well with salt and pepper and stir in the sage, remaining butter and all the parmesan. Cover, let rest for a couple of minutes, then serve immediately.



Barley risotto with red wine and mushrooms

Orzotto al vino rosso e funghi

► **SERVES** 4 ► **PREPARATION** 10 minutes ► **COOKING** 45 minutes

Barley risotto, *orzotto*, also known as *barlotto*, is one of my friend Nick Nairn's specialities. He loves to make this in autumn after mushroom-hunting near his cooking school on the Lake of Menteith. I have always loved the chewy nuttiness of this recipe, which is made without the slow addition of stock. To make serving this dish easier, Nick suggests making it in advance and reheating it – something it does well, because unlike rice, barley doesn't go soggy with keeping.

INGREDIENTS

3 *tbsp* olive oil

175g pearl barley, washed and drained

1 small onion, finely chopped

1 garlic clove, finely chopped

500ml hot chicken stock, vegetable stock or water

1 *tbsp* light soy sauce

150ml red wine

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

300g fresh chanterelles (or other wild and cultivated mushrooms, such as porcini or portobellos)

75g unsalted butter

2 *tbsp* freshly chopped parsley

1 *tbsp* freshly chopped tarragon

Heat the oil in a large saucepan, then add the barley and stir until it starts to turn golden (not brown) – this will take about 5 minutes. Add the onion and garlic and continue frying for 5-10 minutes, until the barley starts to brown. Don't let it burn, but you want a good, toasted flavour.

Add the stock, soy sauce, red wine, salt and pepper. Bring to the boil, turn down the heat, part-cover with a lid, then simmer gently until nearly all the liquid has been absorbed – this should take at least 30

minutes. The beauty of this one is that you don't need to stir it constantly.

Meanwhile, brush or scrape the mushrooms clean (slicing any bigger ones to size) and heat a frying pan until hot. Add two-thirds of the butter and all the mushrooms. Stir-fry over medium heat for 4-5 minutes, until lightly browned. Season with salt and pepper. Add the stir-fried mushrooms to the barley and mix gently. Remove from the heat and cover with kitchen foil with a few holes pierced in it to let the barley swell and absorb all the liquid. Leave it in a warm place for 15 minutes. (At this stage, you could let it cool, reheating it for serving up to 24 hours later.)

To serve, put the barley risotto pan back on the heat and beat in the parsley, tarragon and the remaining butter. Stir well until hot, add salt and pepper to taste and pile onto heated plates. Serve immediately.



Artichoke risotto with lamb

Risotto ai carciofi con agnello

► **SERVES 4** ► **PREPARATION 30 minutes** ► **COOKING 45 minutes**

Artichokes are just made to go with lamb. Fresh smaller artichokes with a purple blush are best here, but you can use pared-down globe artichokes or the chargrilled ones sold in delis.

INGREDIENTS

12 artichokes
1 tbsp olive oil
500g lamb fillet, trimmed
125g unsalted butter
1.5 litres hot chicken, beef, veal or vegetable stock
2 shallots, finely chopped
1 celery stalk, finely chopped
1 small carrot, finely chopped
6 roasted garlic cloves
400g risotto rice
150ml fruity white wine
20 dry-cured black olives (Greek-style), pitted
1 tbsp finely chopped fresh marjoram
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

First prepare the fresh artichokes, if using. Brush with olive oil and chargrill for 5 minutes in a stove-top grill pan, turning often. Otherwise, quarter the bought chargrilled ones and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 220°C/Gas Mark 7. Heat an ovenproof frying pan until very hot. Season the lamb well. Add the oil to the pan, then the lamb and a tablespoon of the butter and cook over high heat for 2-3 minutes, until well browned on all sides.

Put the pan straight into the oven and roast for 7-12 minutes, depending on how you like your meat. When cooked, transfer the lamb to a heated plate, cover and let it relax in a warm place while you make the risotto.

Pour a ladleful of the stock into the pan and deglaze. Set aside.

Put the remaining stock in a saucepan and keep at a gentle simmer. Melt half the remaining butter in a large, heavy saucepan and add the shallots, celery, carrot and roasted garlic cloves.

Cook gently for 10 minutes until soft, golden and translucent but not browned. Add the rice and stir until well coated with the butter and heated through. Pour in the wine and boil hard until it has reduced and almost disappeared.

Add the pan juices from cooking the lamb, then begin adding the stock, a large ladleful at a time, stirring gently until each ladle has almost been absorbed by the rice. The risotto should be kept at a bare simmer throughout cooking, so don't let the rice dry out – add more stock as necessary. Continue until the rice is tender and creamy, but the grains still firm. This should take about 15-20 minutes depending on the type of rice used.

Stir in the olives and marjoram, season to taste and beat in the remaining butter. Fold in the artichokes. Cover and let rest for a couple of minutes so the risotto can relax. Carve the meat into thick slices, then serve the risotto immediately, topped with the sliced lamb.

Roasted garlic risotto with goats' cheese and rosemary

Risotto con caprino, aglio dorato e rosmarino

➤ **SERVES** 4-6 ➤ **PREPARATION** 20 minutes ➤ **COOKING** 1 hour

I use two kinds of cheese in this indulgent risotto. The soft cheese melts creamily into the risotto, whereas the cheese with rind (bûcheron chèvre) cut from a thick log, grills to perfection.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

30cm (12-inch) square of foil
a baking sheet

non-stick baking parchment

INGREDIENTS

20 large garlic cloves, peeled (you will only use 8, but you can keep the rest in a jar of oil in the refrigerator)

75ml extra virgin olive oil,
plus extra for basting

4-6 large and thick slices of goats' cheese
with rind

4-6 small sprigs of rosemary, plus extra to
serve

1.5 litres hot vegetable or chicken stock

1 red onion, finely chopped

2 tbsp chopped fresh rosemary

500g risotto rice

200g soft mild goats' cheese
(the one with no rind)

50g freshly grated parmesan
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Put the garlic and 2 tbsp oil in a mixing bowl, season and toss well. Put the garlic in the middle of the foil, fold up the long ends and fold together at the top to create a seal. Fold in the short ends to create a sealed packet. Set on a baking sheet and roast in the preheated oven for 20 minutes, then turn over, cut a small hole in the top and roast the packet upside down for a further 10 minutes.

Put the sliced goats' cheese on a grill pan lined with the parchment paper. Brush with olive oil and put a rosemary sprig on each one. Sprinkle with pepper and set aside. Preheat the grill.

Put the stock in a saucepan and keep at a gentle simmer. Heat the remaining olive oil

in a heavy saucepan. Add the onion and cook gently for 5 minutes. Add 8 roasted garlic cloves and half the chopped rosemary. Cook for 5 minutes, then stir in the rice until well coated with oil and heated through.

Begin adding the stock, a ladleful at a time, stirring gently until each ladle has almost been absorbed by the rice. The risotto should be kept at a bare simmer throughout cooking – don't let the rice dry out and add more stock as necessary. Halfway through cooking time, grill the sliced goats' cheese until browned on top. Continue until the rice is tender and creamy, but the grains still firm. (This should take about 15-20 minutes depending on the type of rice used.) Stir in the soft cheese and remaining rosemary.

Taste, season well and beat in the Parmesan. Cover and let rest for a couple of minutes so the risotto can relax, then serve immediately. Using a palette knife, set a slice of goats' cheese on each serving and top with a sprig of rosemary.

INFORMATION

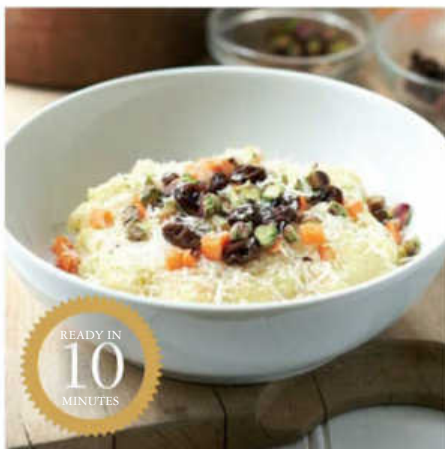
➤ *Risotto* by Maxine Clark, photography by Martin Brigdale, published by Ryland Peters & Small

➤ *Risotto* will be available to *Italia!* readers for the special price of £11.99 including postage & packaging (RRP £16.99) by telephoning Macmillan Direct on ☎ 01256 302 699 and quoting the reference GLR EA9



Pronto!

Some of the more complex Italian recipes will take hours to prepare – and just as long to enjoy! – but when you're in a hurry you're going to need quick-and-easy meals to cook. *Italia!* presents five healthy favourites...



Pistachio polenta *Polenta al pistacchio*

Even in ideal hot, dry conditions the pistachio tree can take ten years to produce a crop. So its 'nut' (botanically, it is a 'seed') is highly prized.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 5 minutes
- **COOKING** 5 minutes

INGREDIENTS

600ml vegetable or chicken stock
125g quick-cook polenta
50g unsalted butter
50g Parmesan or Grana Padano, grated
1 small carrot, peeled, cubed
salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tbsp pistachios, toasted, chopped
2 tbsp raisins, soaked in warm water

Bring the stock to the boil and reduce to a low heat. Pour in the polenta, stirring quickly with a wooden spoon. Stir vigorously for 1-2 minutes to make sure all the stock is absorbed.

Add the butter and half of the cheese to the pan, then stir in two-thirds of the carrot. Season generously, then divide the polenta between two plates. Top with the nuts, carrots, raisins and the remaining cheese. Serve immediately.



Piedmontese chicken breast

Petto di pollo alla piemontese

This recipe calls for the chicken breasts to be poached, a very healthy cooking method.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 15 minutes
- **COOKING** 35 minutes

INGREDIENTS

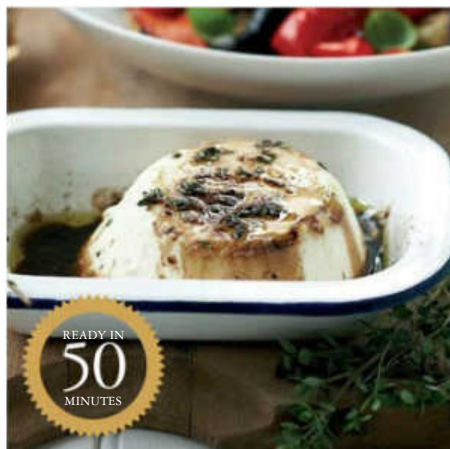
4 tomatoes, peeled, seeds removed, roughly chopped
3 anchovies drained of oil, chopped
a small handful of basil, torn
2 garlic cloves, peeled, finely sliced
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 red peppers, cut in half, seeds removed
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
2 free-range chicken breasts
4 tbsp ricotta
1 tbsp pesto
1 tbsp toasted pine nuts

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Mix the tomatoes, anchovies, basil and garlic together in a bowl and season. Put the pepper halves skin-side down on a baking tray, then divide the tomato mix between them and drizzle with oil. Place in the oven for 35 minutes.

Meanwhile, lay the chicken breasts on a board and slice down one side, without cutting through to the other side, to open them up. Place parchment paper over the breasts and bash with a rolling pin to flatten.

Mix the ricotta with the pesto and pine nuts, then season well. Divide the mixture between the insides of the chicken breasts, then fold the breasts closed. Place each breast on a 30cm square sheet of microwaveable clingfilm and wrap it tightly around the breast. Wrap another piece of clingfilm around each breast.

Bring a saucepan of water to a simmer and lower the chicken into it. Simmer for 20 minutes then remove and unwrap. Cut the chicken breasts in half, season generously and serve with the Piedmont peppers.



Baked ricotta with grilled vegetables

Ricotta al forno con verdure grigliate

Traditional ricotta is not strictly vegetarian, as it is made with mozzarella, which is made with rennet – though there are vegetarian ricottas.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 40 minutes

INGREDIENTS

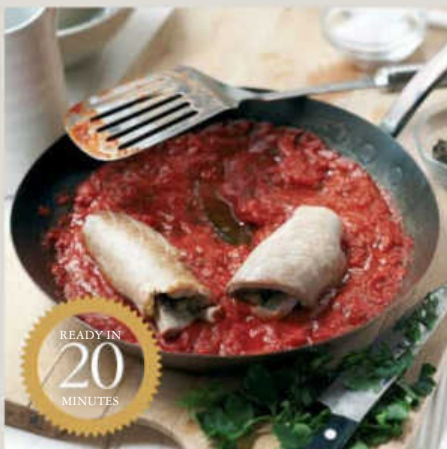
1 aubergine, thinly sliced lengthways
 1 red pepper, seeds removed, cut into 8 slices lengthwise
 1 courgette, thinly sliced lengthwise
 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
 salt and freshly ground black pepper
 1 tub of ricotta
 1 tsp thyme leaves
 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
 2 tbsp honey
 1 tsp lemon juice
 a small handful of fresh basil

Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas Mark 4. Toss the aubergine, pepper and courgette with 3 tbsp olive oil and seasoning in a bowl, then spread in a baking tray. Bake in the oven, turning after 15 minutes.

Add the rest of the oil to a small ovenproof dish. Drain the ricotta of excess water but keep whole, then place the ricotta in the ovenproof dish. Scatter with seasoning and thyme leaves.

Mix the vinegar, honey and lemon juice in a bowl, then drizzle over the ricotta. Bake with the vegetables for 30–40 minutes.

Remove the vegetables and ricotta from the oven. Scatter the fresh basil leaves over the vegetables and serve with the ricotta and crusty bread.



Swordfish in tomato sauce

Involtini di pesce spada

Swordfish mature slowly, developing their distinctive 'sword' only as adults, and not reproducing until they are about five years old. They are nonetheless abundant and there is no concern for their preservation as a species.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 10 minutes

INGREDIENTS

250g good-quality tomato sauce
 3 tbsp fresh breadcrumbs
 15g salted capers
 25g black olives, pitted, chopped
 1 tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley
 2 tbsp orange juice
 salt and freshly ground black pepper
 4 thin slices of swordfish or tuna
 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Heat the tomato sauce in a large frying pan. Mix the breadcrumbs in a bowl with the capers, black olives, parsley and orange juice. Season to taste with salt and black pepper.

Lay the slices of swordfish on a plate and spread some of the breadcrumb filling on each slice. Roll the slices up and secure with a cocktail stick.

Heat the oil in a frying pan, then add the swordfish rolls to the pan and sear carefully on all sides. Transfer the swordfish rolls to the pan of tomato sauce. Heat gently for 5 minutes.



Tagliatelle with Trapani pesto

Tagliatelle con pesto alla trapanese

This makes a lot of pesto, so if you have too much, pop the excess in a container and keep it in the fridge for up to three days.

- **SERVES** 2
- **PREPARATION** 10 minutes
- **COOKING** 10 minutes

INGREDIENTS

200g tagliatelle
 1 garlic clove, peeled
 large handful of basil
 salt and freshly ground black pepper
 60g skinned almonds, finely ground
 6 plum tomatoes, peeled, seeds removed
 40g Parmesan or Grana Padano, grated
 50ml extra virgin olive oil

Bring a saucepan of salted water to the boil, add the tagliatelle and cook according to the instructions on the packet.

Meanwhile, pound the garlic, basil and some salt in a pestle and mortar. If you are pushed for time you can use a food processor, but a pestle and mortar produces a smoother result.

Add the almonds, tomatoes and Parmesan to the basil in the pestle and mortar, then pour in enough olive oil to reach the desired consistency. Pound to bring all the elements together. Add black pepper and salt, if required.

Drain the pasta, but save a little of the cooking water. Return the pasta to the pan (off the heat), and stir in the pesto. Add a little of the pasta water to loosen the sauce, if necessary.

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*on any device,
any time!*

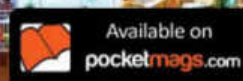
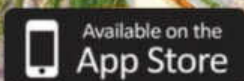


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ITALIAN DESSERT WINES

La Dolce Vita is all the sweeter with a drop of dessert wine around Christmas time. **Paul Pettengale** ponders whether you should imbibe the white, red or sparkling versions...

Dessert wine is something you either love or loathe. Sometimes described as overly-sweet and cloying, it can incur groans of protest from dinner guests. If that's the case, you're serving the wrong stuff. A really good dessert wine – and boy, do the Italians know how to make them! – should fill the mouth with tastes of tropical fruit, be sweet yet fresh and complement the likes of

Red dessert wines are relatively uncommon but they are a delight

panettone, pastries and fruit tarts. And that's just for the whites; for there are also red dessert wines to consider. The *recioto* method is used – especially in the Valpolicella region near Verona – to produce wines using dried red grapes (a bit like Amarone, though that is a dry wine, rather than sweet). Red dessert wines are relatively uncommon (you'll need to head in the direction of the specialist wine shops and importers rather than your local supermarket to pick one up), but they are a delight. A good one shouldn't be too heavy, nor too strong (15 per cent ABV max', we'd suggest). And at this time of year the perfect food match is anything made with dark chocolate or even the traditional British Christmas pudding. Not your thing? Then why not indulge in a drop of sweet fizz? And Asti Spumanti fits the bill... ➤

DRINK ITALIA!





'LE COLOMBARE' RECIOTO DI SOAVE 2011, PIEROPAN

From Liberty Wines
www.libertywines.co.uk
 Price £26.99 for 35cl
 Pieropan was the first company to ever use the Soave name (based on the region) on its labels, back in the 1930s. And it remains one of the best producers in the zone. This sweet wine uses grapes that are dried on straw mats for up to five months before maceration and the result is an extraordinarily rich, golden hued wine that screams apricot, melon, lychee and other exotic fruit. It's sweet, but its acidity catches that sweetness and the finish is immense.



GREAT WITH...

A cream- or ice cream-filled panettone – or drink it on its own, it's that good.

RECIOTO DELLA VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO 'ANGELORUM' 2011, MASI

From Berkmann
www.berkmann.co.uk
 Price £22.50 for 35cl
 'Finely balanced' is the best way to describe this red dessert wine from the renowned producer Masi (from the Veneto). It has a degree of sweetness but there's enough tartness (bitter cherry) in there to ensure it's neither cloying nor overpowering. Imagine a really rich Amarone wine and you'd not be too far off the mark. Not too strong at 14 per cent ABV. One to savour with a mince pie, perhaps.



GREAT WITH...

Mince pies, Christmas cake, Christmas pudding, brittle dark chocolate.

'GIOVANNI ALLEGRINI' RECIOTO DELLA VALPOLICELLA 2011, ALLEGRIINI

From Liberty Wines
www.libertywines.co.uk
 Price £35.99 for 50cl
 Yes, this is a lot of money for 50cl of a red dessert wine, but what a wine this is! It's extremely rich and powerful, yet subtle and smooth. The fruit is vast in the mouth – a combination of sweet dark cherries, ripe damsons and bitter chocolate, though at no point does it taste overly sweet. Allegrini is a premium producer in the Veneto region and this wine demonstrates just why. Go one – it's Christmas – treat yourself.



GREAT WITH...

We enjoyed this with very thinly-sliced carpaccio of fillet steak. It worked!

TORCOLATO 2011, MACULAN

From Berkmann
www.berkmann.co.uk
 Price £22.50 for 35cl
 Vespaiola isn't a grape variety that many would have heard of, and yet it thrives in the Veneto as long as it's treated with respect and isn't expected to produce large yields. The Torcolato from Maculan is made with 100 per cent Vespaiola, and it's an absolute gem of a wine. It has an intense aroma of honey and orange blossom, and an abundance of tropical fruit in the mouth. But it's this wine's balance between sweet and dry that makes it. It's a rare dessert wine where you could drink the bottle.



GREAT WITH...

Panettone, of course, but how about a bowl of red grapes and soft cheese?

ASTI NV, SAN LEO

From Waitrose

www.waitrose.com

Price £9.99 for 70cl

There was a time when Asti sparkling wines were associated with weddings done 'on the cheap', where champagne just wasn't within budget. Prosecco and even Cava back then would never have featured. But Asti wines have improved considerably. They're not strong – this one is just 7 per cent ABV – and so they make excellent breakfast wines with fruit and pastries on a Christmas morning. This San Leo wine is light and refreshing and only slightly sweet, and we regard it as one of the best Asti wines available.

I CAPITELLI 2011, ANSELM

From Great Western Wine

www.greatwesternwine.co.uk

Price £18.50 for 35cl

Our favourite Italian dessert wine – though it has featured twice before as 'Discovery of the Month'. Peaches, apricots, pineapple and honey all feature. Honestly, when I pass away I want my ashes scattered on my favourite beach in Devon (my wife and kids know which one) and I'd like a bottle of this poured into the sand. Then I know I really will have died and gone to heaven. But in the mean time I'll be sampling this with friends and family on Christmas Day with mid-morning pastries.

MARSALA VERGINE RISERVA 1988, MARCO DE BARTOLI

From Berry Bros. & Rudd

www.bbr.com

Price £62.00 for 50cl

This wine has spent over 26 years maturing in oak and chestnut barrels. It's a 'virgin' Marsala, so it hasn't been fortified with extra grape must and caramel. As a result it is pale in colour and retains a freshness remarkable for its age. On the nose you'll discover orange peel and a salty zestiness (it is made using Grillo grapes grown close to the sea). In the mouth it's rich, rewarding and irresistibly moreish. The best Marsala going? We certainly think so.

IT'S THE MISSING LINK

Prosecco is synonymous with Christmas in Italy (though it's drunk throughout the year!). Yet although it works brilliantly with *panettone* at the Christmas dinner table, you could hardly describe it as sweet. The fairly pricey Cartizze version of prosecco fizz is about as sweet as it gets, though that one is not easy to get hold of, given its rarity. Rarer still though is a genuine, still dessert wine from the Prosecco zone, made using the same grape variety as the sparkler, though employing the *recioto* method of production. I've sampled it – once – when staying in the region and it was delicious, reminding me of a quality Tokaji. Alas, I've been unable to find a bottle in the UK (so I'll have to head back to Valdobbiadene).

Rarer still is a genuine, still dessert wine from the Prosecco zone



GREAT WITH...

Lighter pastries, such as croissant, or slices of your favourite breakfast fruits.



GREAT WITH...

Because it's not too sweet it works well with nuts (almonds, brazil, pistachio).



GREAT WITH...

Dense cakes packed with fruit, or lighter sponges (just avoid any cream).



Photograph © iStock

IN PRINT

In this month's **book review section** we sample a selection of recipe books from The Silver Spoon Kitchen, we delight in the foods of Rome, and we discover how to follow in the footsteps of St Francis...



THE SILVER SPOON KITCHEN ITALIAN COOKERY SCHOOL PASTA, PIZZA & DESSERTS

Phaidon, £9.95 each (paperback)

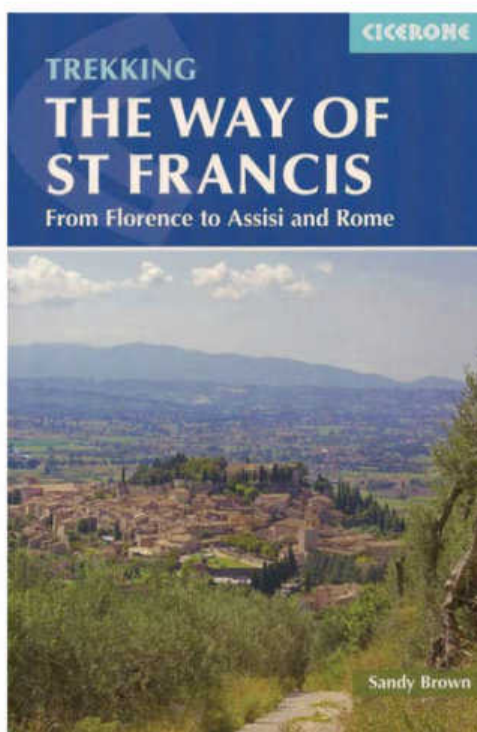
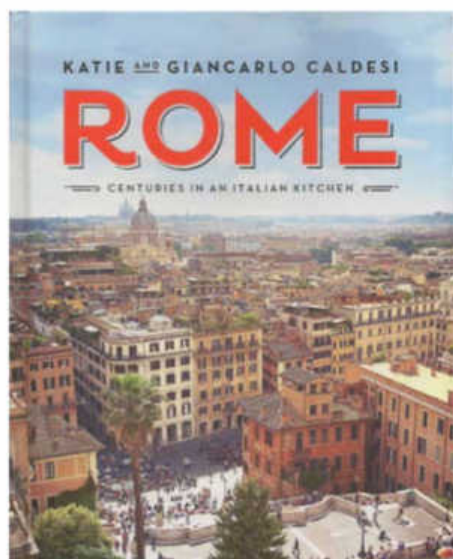
These three new books from the Silver Spoon are softback though sturdy (essential for books to be used in the kitchen) and each goes beyond its rather simple title. *Pizza*, for instance, also features recipes for calzone, focaccia, savoury pies and strudels, as well as detailing the equipment you need and the techniques involved in making your own doughs. *Pasta* has detailed instructions on how to make your own pasta using traditional methods with a hand-turned pasta machine and breaks its 75 recipes down into sections based on pasta shapes. And the recipes include a few surprises... Lasagne with truffled veal and leek sauce, for instance. Those of you with a sweet tooth will inevitably be drawn to *Desserts*, over 75 recipes from all over Italy. The main recipe sections are entitled Cookies, Cakes, Tarts and Filled Pastry. There's no *gelato* though, which is a shame. However, each of these well-written (and photographed) books deserves a place on your kitchen shelf.

ROME: CENTURIES IN AN ITALIAN KITCHEN

*Katie and
Giancarlo Caldesi,*

Hardy Grant,
£25.00 (hardback)

"Just as all roads lead to Rome, all roads in Rome lead to a delicious meal." And to prove it Katie and Giancarlo treat us to over 270 pages of recipes and cookery techniques from the capital. We really liked the section on Roman street food.



TREKKING THE WAY OF ST FRANCIS

Sandy Brown, Cicerone,
£16.95 (paperback)

Sandy Brown, a reverend from Seattle, Washington, has walked over 3,500 kilometres on pilgrim trails across Italy and Spain. So he's well placed to author this extensive guide – complete with maps and information on entertainment and essential equipment – where he follows in the footsteps of St Francis. The trek takes him – and you – on a 500km route from Florence, all the way down to Rome.

NEXT MONTH IN ITALIA!

DISCOVER TRIORA

We head into the hills of Liguria to visit this undiscovered gem.
Join us for 48 Hours in one of Italy's most beautiful villages...

LIVE IN LE MARCHE

We revisit the property hotspot
that's on everyone's radar

TRAVELLING THE PO

Going downstream from city
to city along one of Italy's
most famous rivers

PLUS The gastronomy of
Tuscany, 'secret' Italy,
sourcing top-notch Italian
foods in the UK, quick and
easy recipes from the Silver
Spoon, Barolo wines, the best
fresh pasta, news, reviews
and – as ever – much more.

Contents may be subject to change

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DON'T MISS ITALIA! ISSUE 134 ON SALE 10 DECEMBER

ITALY FLIGHT GUIDE

Let *Italia!*'s flight guide take the hard work out of **planning your trip**. Just pick your ideal destination from our handy map of Italy and locate the corresponding number from the list.

DESTINATION	ORIGIN	OPERATOR
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	LDN Stansted	Ryanair
	Manchester	Thomson
2 Ancona	LDN Stansted	Ryanair
3 Bari	Dublin	Ryanair
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4 Bergamo	Bristol	Ryanair
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20 Pescara	LDN Stansted	Ryanair
21 Pisa	Belfast	Jet2
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*Starts April 2016, **Starts May 2016. From the **United States** there are direct flights to Italy from New York and Miami.

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ITALIA! ICONS



Would you know that this was a Ferrari? It has the looks, but it doesn't have the badges. Instead, each distinctive yellow emblem just says 'Dino' in a curious, handwritten font. It wasn't just a car, it was the declaration of a father's love for a son lost in his prime.

#05

THE FERRARI DINO

It's a tale that is both tragic and endearing. How the love of a lost son found shape in one of the best-looking Italian cars of all time...

Born 19 January 1932, Alfredo Ferrari was son and heir to one of the most legendary car makers in history. Enzo Ferrari stopped racing his cars when his son was born – it was a promise he'd made to ensure his offspring had a father that hadn't tragically died pursuing his passion for speed. Alas, fate was to play a cruel card and it was Enzo that buried his son rather than the other way around.

On 30 June 1956 Alfredo – who was nicknamed Alfredino, or Dino – died of a muscular dystrophy disease. He was just 24. Enzo was, of course, devastated. And so, when he launched a new marque of car – utilising the six-cylinder engine his son had designed before his death – he chose not to use the Ferrari brand name. This was to be a cheaper, more accessible type of car (to rival the Porsche 911). And it wasn't to feature the famous prancing horse Ferrari badge. Instead, the new cars, of which there were four models between 1968 and 1976, had a totally new badge of honour. And that was simply 'Dino'. A fitting tribute to a loved son. ■



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LAKE COMO

A scenic view of Lake Como. In the foreground, a white speedboat with an outboard motor is moving across the water, leaving a white wake. Several people are on board the boat. In the background, the lake is surrounded by steep, forested mountains. A small town with colorful buildings and a church spire is visible on the right side of the lake. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

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